# CRASH

THE QUARTERLY COMIC BOOK REVIEW

VOLUME ONE • NUMBER ONE • FALL 1994 4.95 U.S 5.95 CAN

## CHESTER BROWN'S *underwater*

A FEATURE LENGTH INTERVIEW:

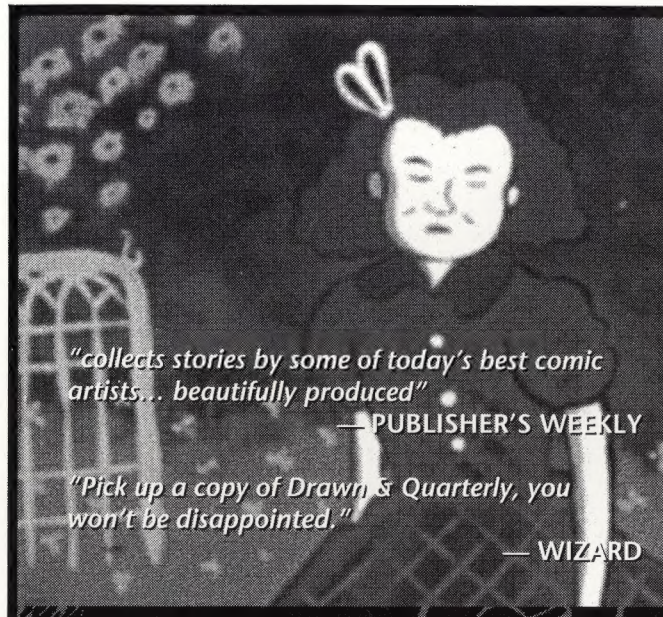
from the submerged to the *sublime*

SPECIAL SNEAK PREVIEW:

## OUR CANCER YEAR

BY HARVEY PEKAR, JOYCE BRABNER & FRANK STACK

also: the line drawings of jean cocteau



# DRAWN & QUARTERLY

*"collects stories by some of today's best comic artists... beautifully produced"*
— PUBLISHER'S WEEKLY

*"Pick up a copy of Drawn & Quarterly, you won't be disappointed."*
— WIZARD

*DRAWN & QUARTERLY* returns as a new upgraded lushly printed magazine, similar in format to the recent *Best of Drawn & Quarterly* book, with over two-thirds of the features in full color. From **Jacques Tardi**, who provides a brutal story set amidst the trenches of World War 1, to **Maurice Vellekoop**, who muses about the rise and fall of a once-famous opera maestro, this first issue brings together he work of some of Europe's and North America's finest storytellers and illustrators. The covers, endpapers, and dustjacket flaps are by **Seth**, and highlights of upcoming issues include two 70-page full-color serials by **Loustal**, one of France's best comic artists, and a feature-length story and covers by **David Mazzucchelli**. With this new volume, this multiple Eisner and Harvey-nominated series will once again remain true to its name by coming out on a Quarterly schedule.

$5.95 US / $6.95 Canada

## Chester Brown's UNDERWATER Number One

Chester Brown, one of the comic medium's few genuine virtuosos, embarks on an ambitious new direction once again with his new series *UNDERWATER*, a story about several weeks in the life of a woman. The series is a blend of Brown's wry sensibilities, from the absurdist elements of his earlier work *Ed the Happy Clown*, to the subtle neo-realism of his recent autobiographical stories. Like *Ed*, *UNDERWATER* will be set in a fictional reality which is strikingly similar and yet somehow oddly different from the real world. This new series, Brown's first in nearly a decade, will likely be his most ambitious story to date, spanning at least twenty issues in length.

Issue #1: $2.95 U.S. / $3.50 Canada.

*"Chester Brown's work is as delightful as comics get."* — ROLLING STONE

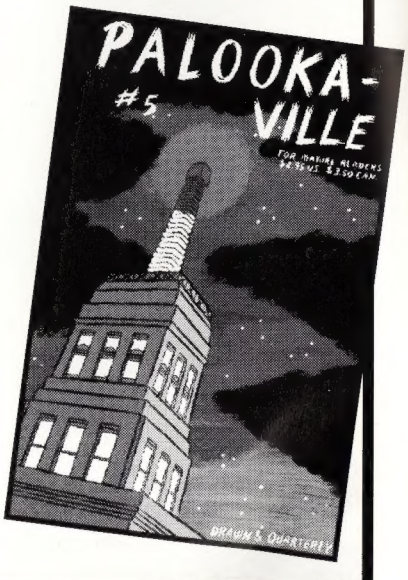
# PALOOKA-VILLE

*"...rich and evocative... characterized by small moments revealing the author's sharp eye for detail"*
— THE GLOBE AND MAIL

*"...understated, intelligent, and funny."*
— PORTLAND PRESS HERALD

The four-part series "It's A Good Life If You Don't Weaken" is the current storyline of this lushly illustrated comic book. After digging through pages of old *New Yorker* magazines, Seth begins an obsessive search for an old gag cartoonist from the 1940's.

Issues #'s 1 to 5 $2.95 U.S. / $3.50 Canada each.




The above items are available in many fine stores or they can be ordered directly by mail from Drawn & Quarterly, 5550 Jeanne Mance #16, Montreal, Quebec, Canada H2V 4K6. All prices listed are postpaid and payment should be made by check or money order; Americans and International pay in U.S. funds; Canadian funds in Canada. Ask for our free mail order catalogue.

# CRASH

THE QUARTERLY COMIC BOOK REVIEW

FALL 1994 VOL.1 NO.1

2
**Introductory Notes**
by S. Solomos

5
**Shades of Brown**
The Chester Brown Interview

23
**CROSS/CULTURE: STORYBOOK --- This Issue Featuring:**

24
**Skoal** by Danny Levy
**with Illustrations by Maurice Vellekoop**

28
**Cartoon Archive** by V. Aliberti
**The LIne Drawings of Jean Cocteau**

31
**SPECIAL PREVIEW: Our Cancer Year**
by Harvey Pekar, Joyce Brabner & Frank Stack

37
**PICTURE STORY REVIEW**
A Critical Look at Today's Comic Books

**Editor :**
S. Solomos

**Associate Editor:**
Vincent Aliberti

**Art Director :**
Yassar Monteleone

**Ass't Art Director :**
Clem Botelho

**Typing/Proofing & General Consultant:**
Paula Pereira

**Contributing Writers :**

Harvey Pekar
Michael Redhill
Danny Levy
Bernie Pleskach
Joyce Brabner

**Contributing Illustrators :**

Sean Scoffield
Maurice Vellekoop
Clem Botelho
Fiona Smyth

**Cover Photo**
Rick McGinnis

**Back Cover**
Chester Brown

**Published by**
STEVE SOLOMOS &
VINCENT ALIBERTI

Printed at Ronald's Printing in Canada.

Crash Vol. 1, No. 1 (Fall 1994) is published on a quarterly basis by **Crash Communications**- 601 Markham Street Toronto, Ontario, M6G 2L7, Canada.

All stories, articles, essays, art and photographs are copyright ©1994 their respective writers, artists, & photographers. This edition is copyright **©1994 Crash Communications**.

# Introductory Notes

**The road to this inaugural issue of *CRASH* has been a long and treacherous one. Conceived many moons ago as an overview of the comics medium, *CRASH* went through many evolutionary phases. At one time or another we flirted with covering almost every aspect of modern culture. However, what you now hold in your hands is representative of our original vision: a magazine that critiques and examines the aesthetics of the cartoon story-telling form.**

**We will sometimes step sideways (as this issue's prose story suggests) but otherwise the concentration will be on innovative comics creators (like our feature interview with Chester Brown) and on their works (see "Picture Story Review" section). And we are especially proud this issue to be showcasing a special preview of *Our Cancer Year*, a new graphic novel (over 200 pages in total) by Harvey Pekar, Joyce Brabner and Frank Stack. This groundbreaking work will be released in the fall by the N.Y. publishing house, Four Walls Eight Windows.**

**We are pleased you have chosen to take this ride with us.**

**-Steve Solomos**

Many have helped us along the way in this project. To thank everyone would be impossible, but the efforts of some require acknowledgement. The following list includes a number of the fine folks who contributed to previous (and unpublished) incarnations of this magazine. Here goes: Thanks to **Sean Scoffield, Domenic Monteleone, Michel Vrana, Chris Oliveros, Marina Lesenko, Thom Powers, Gisele Gordon, Bill Marks, Deborah Marks, Fiona Smyth, John Oaks, Denis Kitchen, Greg Baisden, Mark Prent, Maurice Collodo, Jon Longhi, Barbara Gowdy, Mark Askwith, Peter Joseph, Robert Myre, Charles Phillips, Jim Ordolis, Harlan Ellison,** the good gentlemen at **Campus Systems** and, of course, all of this issue's contributors.

Special thanks must go to **Gerry Ciccoritti** without whose spiritual and financial support, this magazine would not have been.

Extra special thanks go to **Paula** and to **Di.**

# FIONA SMYTH'S
# NOCTURNAL EMISSIONS

**HIGH -OCTANE DREAMS AND KILLER KITSCH FROM CANADA'S CARTOON DIVA**

**PUBLISHED BY VORTEX COMICS**
**P.O. BOX 173**
**SANBORN, NY 14132**

**ISSUES #1,3 & 4 AVAILABLE NOW FOR $3.00 EACH POSTPAID.**
**AND WATCH FOR ISSUE #5 IN LATE 1994!**

# THE BEGUILING

## COMICS & CULTURE FOR THE EDUCATED ELITE

**NEW MAIL ORDER CATALOG AVAILABLE SOON FROM TORONTO'S EISNER AWARD WINNING COMICS SHOP!**

**THE BEGUILING**
**601 MARKHAM ST.**
**TORONTO, ON M6G 2L7**
**PH/FAX (416) 533-9168**

**CALL, FAX OR WRITE FOR DETAILS TODAY!**

# FEATURE INTERVIEW:

## shades of brown

The 1980s were witness to a flowering of the "Picture-Story" Art Form. Some have termed it the "Alternative Comics" Revolution. Use whatever hackneyed phrase you wish, it remains arguably the most significant era in the history of that odd medium that tells stories through hand-written words and static pictures.

During this period Art Spiegelman gave us the Pulitzer Prize winning ***Maus***, Harvey Pekar influenced a generation with his autobiographical comics, and Robert Crumb, the 60's pop icon, delivered his finest work ever. This "old guard" had shown up for the dance, but it was a group of younger upstarts who then crashed the party and turned up the volume. The most celebrated of this group include: Peter Bagge, Daniel Clowes, Jaime Hernandez, Gilbert Hernandez and the subject of this interview, the enigmatic Chester Brown.

Chester lived in Toronto during the 80's and this is where he began self-publishing ***Yummy Fur***, a mish-mash of alternately amusing and revolting "mini-comics". In 1986, local publisher Vortex Comics picked up the book, reprinting Chester's self published endeavours in "comic-sized" format and put it into the hands of an unsuspecting audience. It was not well-received at first. By the fourth issue Chester began an all-new narrative with one of his characters, Ed the Happy Clown. With this issue began a story of sexual repression, surgical mutilation, angst, fear, casual indifference and violent death. From here there was no looking back.

His work caused a sensational stir. The U.S. media was on the trail and soon magazines like ***Rolling Stone*** and ***Print*** were heralding the efforts of this sparkling talent. But Chester was becoming bored. Losing interest in the adventures of Ed, his attention turned inward, to himself.

His first autobiographical story appeared in January of 1990. Turning away from what had proved successful both critically and financially, Chester's initial efforts puzzled his old readers. And indeed, in aesthetic terms, the results were mixed. But his final narrative "Fuck", a delicately balanced rite-of-passage story, remains an impressive achievement.

Now Chester has shifted focus again. His new serial ***Underwater*** is supposed to blend elements of his fantasy-oriented work with that of his more personal strips. It will take about five years to complete.

This interview was conducted in April of this year. I spoke to Chester via long distance from his current home in Vancouver, British Columbia. These days things are going well for Chester. *Underwater* is just hitting the stands and he's in a new relationship, living with folk-pop songstress Sook-Yin Lee of the band Bob's Your Uncle. For Chester Brown, right now, life is good.

It should be noted that I've known Chester for a few years and have been on friendly terms with him during that span. The informal tone of the interview's verbal interplay illustrates this fact. Yet conversations with him can be trying because Chester is essentially a quiet person. Not shy mind you, just a man of few words. His responses to questions are always measured, and often terse. As such, he is a tough person to interview and an even tougher person to figure. Hopefully the ensuing dialogue will provide some insight into the man and his work.

*-S. Solomos*

**INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY STEVE SOLOMOS**
**EDITED BY STEVE SOLOMOS, VINCENT ALIBERTI & CHESTER BROWN**

**"..Well I tend not to like things that are too didactic. If they're not done well, if they're just a series of speeches and if the aesthetic value is low then I would tend not to like them."**

**POLITICS & CENSORSHIP**

**CRASH: Okay Chester, let me begin with a couple of questions about your background. Now, you were born and raised in the Canadian province of Quebec, correct?**

BROWN: That's right.

**CRASH: And you were apparently raised in a largely Anglo portion of Quebec?**

BROWN: I suppose you could say that...

**CRASH: Well, what was your exposure to French/Quebecois culture?**

BROWN: There wasn't much exposure. I had exactly one French friend. And whenever we'd get together with her, she'd just speak English. Occasionally we'd go over to her house and all of her family would be speaking French and we just wouldn't understand what they were saying. We'd actually be in awe because they tended to speak louder than English people do.

**CRASH: So did you notice that there was definitely a cultural difference between the anglophone culture that you were used to and the francophone culture that was available in their household?**

BROWN: Other than the fact that they seemed to speak louder, I didn't notice anything different.

**CRASH: You lived in Quebec until...**

BROWN: 1979.

**CRASH: Seventy-nine. What was your exposure to the political situation in Quebec, particularly in reference to the Quebec Separatist movement?**

BROWN: It was just something that you heard about on the news. During the October Crisis we didn't see tanks rolling down the streets in Chateauguay where I lived, but I guess that was happening in Montreal.

*{In October of 1970 members of the Front de Libération du Quebec (FLQ) kidnapped the British trade commissioner in Montreal, James Cross, and later that week, Quebec cabinet minister Pierre Laporte. The FLQ was a radical group that demanded autonomy for Quebec and the destruction of the anglophone authority in Canada.*

*In a controversial move, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau implemented the "War Measure's Act". Under the act's regulations, the FLQ became a banned organization, the normal liberties of citizens were suspended, and people were arrested and detained without charges being laid.*

*Within a day of the introduction of these "emergency regulations", Laporte was found murdered in the trunk of a car. Cross was found alive by the end of the year, the kidnappers were captured, tried and convicted for their crimes, and shortly thereafter, the War Measures Act was lifted. -ed}*

**CRASH: Now, when the October Crisis occurred, what was the climate in your circle, your family and friends?**

BROWN: It was relatively relaxed, even unconcerned. It didn't seem to affect our lives at all.

**CRASH: The imposition of the War Measures Act by then Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau - was this not an issue philosophically for anyone you knew?**

BROWN: At the time I was a kid and it just didn't affect my life in any way. At least not in any way that I was aware.

**CRASH: What do you think of the Separatist movement in Quebec?**

BROWN: That's a tough question to answer.

**CRASH: Do you respect their views? Do you think that the French Quebecois have a separate culture and identity that is being held down by English culture and English Canada?**

BROWN: Well, probably, and I don't think that the Canadian Federal government is all that great and if they think they'd be better off without us then perhaps they should give it a go. I'm not categorically against it. I like the idea of keeping

Canada together but then again, if it goes that way, I'm not willing to fight over it.

**CRASH: Okay. Now I've known you for a while. You've always seemed to me to be fairly apolitical. Would you describe yourself as apolitical?**

BROWN: How do you define apolitical? Someone who is just not interested in politics?

**CRASH: Yes, interested in the workings of our government as well as that of foreign ones, someone interested in general political ideologies or philosophies.**

BROWN: If you mean do I think about such matters regularly, the answer is no.

**CRASH: Well, what do you think about art, literature,and more specifically comics, that speak to such matters, themes? How do you feel about comic books that have specific political overtones?**

BROWN: Well I tend not to like things that are too didactic. If they're not done well, if they're just a series of speeches and if the aesthetic value is low then I would tend not to like them. It's of course possible to do a comic that's both political in nature and artistically successful, but it would have to be that combination for me to be interested. The two don't necessarily cancel each other out.

**CRASH: Now, let's just try to define our terms here. Are you saying it's possible to do both and come up with something that is of interest to you personally, or is it possible to do both and still actually achieve what some people would term capital 'A' Art?**

BROWN: I'm not sure...

**CRASH: Let me be more specific. Isn something like *Palestine* by Joe Sacco, he attempts something which has been rare (if not non-existent) in comics, that is journalistic reportage. He's giving you the sense of a particular geo-political climate, while bringing it together with his own experience. Do you feel he's achieved the correct balance in his work?**

BROWN: There are moments in ***Palestine*** that work tremendously well artistically. The second half of the latest issue, issue 4, I thought was brilliant just in every way. [***Palestine*** had actually reached its fifth issue at this point. Chester hadn't seen it yet. -ed]

**CRASH: What do you think of his use of sequences which are written out as opposed to put into sequential panel form as in the second issue. He chronicles previous historical events and simply provides context. Does this make it more of a didactic work?**

BROWN: Hmn, well, if it does, it's a form of didacticism that I didn't mind.

**CRASH: Do you get a sense that *Palestine* is biased in any way?**

BROWN: Yes. **Joe Sacco** certainly has an opinion, a point of view which he held prior to beginning ***Palestine***. He's obviously someone who is interested in politics and has his mind made up about certain things. So, yes, it's biased.

**CRASH: Are you sympathetic to his views, essentialy that the world has largely ignored the injustice being perpetrated against the Palestinian people?**

BROWN: Yeah, definitely.

**CRASH: So, apolitical as you are, you still are sympathetic to the plight of suffering people such as the Palestinians?**

BROWN: Well, when there is a clear injustice being done it's hard to ignore it.

**CRASH: But your feelings in this case are more emotional than political.**

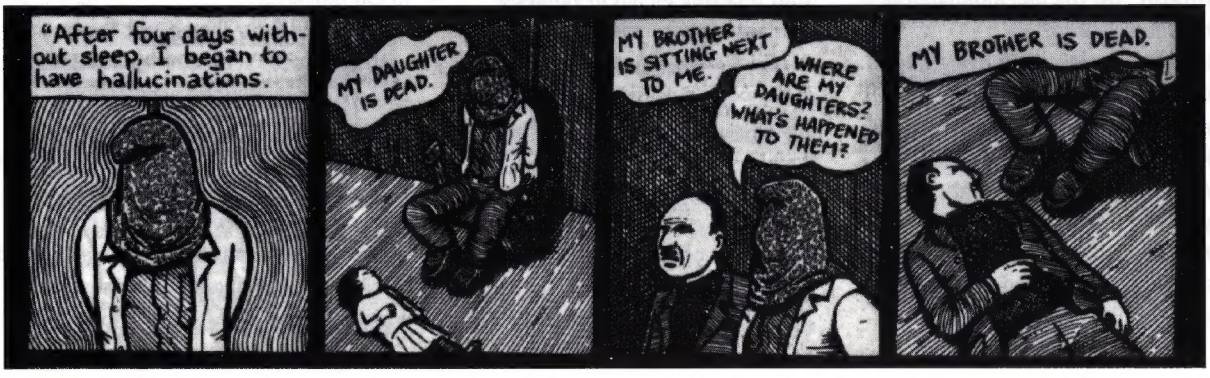
BROWN: Yes...Probably so...

**CRASH: A few years ago you wrote a very angry essay about Bill C-54, a proposed Canadian anti-pornography law that never got passed. So, you are willing to act politically if it affects you personally, which this bill probably would have, at least in terms of your work. Stepping sideways, but still connected to this is the women's movement. I know you're a big supporter of a woman's right to choice in the abortion debate and that overall you believe in the feminist cause. What then do you think of comics like Roberta Gregory's *Naughty Bits* which is a strongly pro-woman work?**

BROWN: Hmn, I loved the first issue.

**CRASH: Well not only did you love the first issue but you wrote a very positive mini-review of it in the back of *Yummy Fur* and recommended it to your readers.**

BROWN: Yes, well, ***Naughty Bits*** is to me a comic where its didactic


"After four days without sleep, I began to have hallucinations.
MY DAUGHTER IS DEAD.
MY BROTHER IS SITTING NEXT TO ME.
WHERE ARE MY DAUGHTERS? WHAT'S HAPPENED TO THEM?
MY BROTHER IS DEAD.

**A PRISON SEQUENCE FROM *PALESTINE*: "JUST BRILLIANT IN EVERY WAY."**

NOTHING SAYS I HAVE TO HUMOR HER... SHIT... I HATE this BUS... ALL THESE SCUMMY PEOPLE... THAT GUY'S BEEN LOOKING AT ME... I'D PRETEND TO READ THIS BOOK BUT IT'LL GIVE ME A HEADACHE... SHIT. OF COURSE, BY THE TIME THEY'D FOUND MY CAR IT'D BEEN STRIPPED... AN' IT WASN'T WORTH SHIT. SO THE INSURANCE COMPANY'S NOT GONNA GIVE ME ANYTHING FOR IT... AFTER ALL THE MONEY I'VE PAID THEM... WHAT A FUCKING SCAM... IT MAKES ME SICK JUST THINKING ABOUT IT...

ROBERTA GREBORY'S *NAUGHTY BITS*: "ITS DIDACTIC NATURE GETS IN THE WAY OF ITS VALUE AS ART."

THE PIVOTAL MURDER SCENE IN *ED THE HAPPY CLOWN*

nature does get in the way of its value as art. To tell the truth I'm basing my opinion only on the first three issues. I haven't read it in a while. The first issue made its points but did so with engaging and interesting stories. The second and third issues seemed more like repeats of the same thing and it wasn't really going anywhere different. Now, maybe it has improved since then but it lost its feel for me.

**CRASH: Does the fact that you feel that it is overly didactic in your view effectively invalidate it as 'legitimate' art? Does it cross the line too much for you to appreciate it?**

BROWN: I think it might be possible to do work that is overtly didactic as long as you're providing enough of something else, enough of whatever else it is that makes art good: good characterization, good plotting, that sort of thing.

**CRASH: Do you feel manipulated by *Naughty Bits*?**

BROWN: I think she's trying, yeah.

**CRASH: Though it's like comparing apples to oranges, how is it that the preachiness of *Naughty Bits* is problematic for you, in contrast to that which you feel may exist in *Palestine*?**

BROWN: Well, in ***Palestine***, I hate to say it, but I do feel that **Joe Sacco** being the more talented creator is better able to draw me into his work. The two works are probably equally didactic. Both creators do have their messages to set forth, and because Joe does it better I'm willing to pay attention to his message. Even though I'm sympathetic to Roberta's message, I just don't think she's telling her story as well.

**CRASH: How do you feel about the fact that some of your work has been reviled by certain feminist groups? What would you say to them if you could?**

BROWN: I'd have to be addressing certain specific charges.

**CRASH: Alright, let's address something specific. In *Ed the Happy Clown*, Josie is murdered during a sexual encounter. At the time certain feminist groups, and certain women who were purporting to be speakers for certain feminist groups, charged that this was an act of violence against women, and that you were in effect supporting the idea that violence against women is okay.**

BROWN: In art, if you don't deal with the negative aspects of life, if you only show the positive things, if you can never show a killing or even somebody shoving another person you end up with a very narrow, very puerile form of art. Their argument I suppose would be that in showing someone being killed you're encouraging people to kill other people. I don't believe that people work on that kind of simple monkey-see monkey-do principle - that if they see an act of violence in a comic book that they go out and then do it. I just don't accept that.

**CRASH: So, you're prepared to say that you don't believe that people's behaviour is influenced adversely by viewing or experiencing certain things in the media?**

BROWN: That's right.

**CRASH: Do you not believe that human beings are influenced by their environment and the things that they see and hear?**

BROWN: Influenced, but in a more general way. If I see someone performing an act on a television show, I don't immediately run out and do the same thing. In fact, most art seems to uphold a kind of moral code that people should live by, that is, don't kill your neighbour or covet his wife and so forth. Do good to them. The majority of stuff we're exposed to seems to tow this line.

**CRASH: That may be so, but there certainly exists a general societal feeling that we are influenced adversely by negative imagery - that is to say, violent programming, pornography, or that which is commonly termed 'hate literature'. You're a fairly liberal minded person. Do you believe that all of these things should be available to anyone who wishes to acquire them?**

**"...if you only show the positive things, if you can never show a killing or even somebody shoving another person you end up with a very narrow, very puerile form of art."**

BROWN: Yes I do. I think people have to make up their own minds. They have to be exposed to all kinds of material and decide for themselves what they believe.

**CRASH: So, in the very clichéed worst case scenario that people like to bring up in this circumstance, what about child pornography: ten year old boys being buggered with coke bottles. If this was the kind of thing that somebody wished to acquire, would this be okay with you? I'm merely testing the bounds of your absolutist view.**

BROWN: Are you talking about comic books?

**CRASH: Let's start with that.**

BROWN: That would be fine if it was just drawings.

**CRASH: What about film where it may acutually be occuring?**

BROWN: If it's something where it's actually happening, then it does bother me. If it involves real kids in that instance then I'm against it being shown.

**CRASH: Do general pornographic films bother you?**

BROWN: No.

**CRASH: Is the difference here merely that in adult pornographic films the sex is consentual?**

BROWN: Yes. That would be the difference.

**CRASH: I take it you're familiar with the American attorney and self appointed anti-pornography spokesperson Catherine MacKinnon?**

BROWN: I've heard the name.

**CRASH: One of the examples she always likes to bring up in her anti-pornography stance is the film *Deep Throat*. Its star, Linda Lovelace, has said she was coerced into performing sexual acts on film, that she was threatened with violence, that there were guns on the set , that this sort of thing is not anything new, and that it continues to occur. What do you think about that?**

BROWN: Well, in the case of Linda Lovelace in particular, I did read Linda's book, ***Ordeal***... and the impression that I got...

**CRASH: You've seen the film?**

BROWN: No I haven't seen the film. But the impression that I got of what she wrote about ***Deep Throat*** was that as far as the director and her fellow actors were concerned, they weren't aware that Chuck Trainers [ according to Lovelace, the man responsible for coercing her into making the film ] was forcing her to do this. Now to all appearances, she was consenting to do this. She was going along [as if this was] her choice. So, if she later takes that back and says "I wasn't agreeing to do that", to me that's too late. If it could be proved that in the pornography industry people were all the time being forced to perform in these movies, that would be something different. But as far as I'm aware, that isn't the case.

**CRASH: You've seen pornographic films I take it?**

BROWN: Um, one or two.

**CRASH: Seeing as how most pornographic films end with a man's climax, do you not feel that women are portrayed merely as tools of male desire? (That is most straight and heterosexual films since there's a whole industry of homosexual and lesbian films that are usually not discussed in the pornography debate.) Do you think this has an effect on men in relating to women on a more equal level?**

BROWN: Well, probably...well, yes. But the thing is, this isn't confined exclusively to pornographic films. It's something that you can see throughout our society in advertising, television shows, what have you. Just because it's sexualized in pornography doesn't mean it's worse there.

**CRASH: If that's the case, do you feel that any sort of standards would be necessary to protect women from being put in that position?**

BROWN: You mean control for the films?

**"If it could be proved that in the pornography industry people were all the time being forced to perform in these movies, that would be something different. But as far as I'm aware, that isn't the case."**

**"The first "Ed the Happy Clown" strip was done when I was twenty-two. I did it throughout my twenties and it does feel like that."**

**CRASH: Either controls of the films, or standards set in terms of advertising; essentially what would amount to censoring the imagery that we are able to consume.**

BROWN: No, but what I'd like to see is alternative views of sexuality in films. Women doing their own films or producing films which expose ridiculous stereotypes in pornography.

**CRASH: So you are in favor of more voices not...**

BROWN: Not restricting the voices.

**CRASH: Sounds good to me. As that's the case, I would assume that the debate which you may have been hearing about, what is commonly known as the 'PC debate', is something you find fairly absurd?**

BROWN: Yes. (chuckling)

**CRASH: So, you do not feel that words need to be modified: going from chairman to chairperson, for instance, that people of native decent in this country should not prevent others from calling them 'Indians'. Nobody should be allowed to be muzzled for using such terms?**

BROWN: Yeah, I'm all for free speech.

**CRASH: And if somebody is offended by certain remarks then they are free to speak to those remarks.**

BROWN: Yes.

**CRASH: Yet, this is one of the things that Catherine MacKinnon talks about. She claims the poor, the infirmed, the downtrodden, the disposessed of this society whoever they may be, whether they be gay, black, poor single mothers living in a ghetto somewhere, that they don't have a voice, they can't speak back. Her argument is that an absolute level of free speech is controlled by the privileged. And they attempt to maintain the status quo. Therefore by muzzling the insensitive voices of the privileged we begin to gain a level of equality. This, MacKinnon claims, is more important than free speech. How do you feel about this argument?**

BROWN: Well, I'm aware of gay writers, of female writers, of black writers. These voices are out there. Our media probably doesn't concentrate on them as much as they should but they are there.

## LOOKING BACK ON *ED*

**CRASH: Okay. Let's step into your work here. Now, there's been a lot said and written about *Ed the Happy Clown*, so I don't want to get too much into that book. But, what do you think of it today?**

BROWN: The first "Ed the Happy Clown" strip was done when I was twenty-two. I did it throughout my twenties and it does feel like that.

**CRASH: So you're saying that you feel it's an immature work?**

BROWN: Yeah, basically. I still like it. I think it has its merits, I suppose. But I certainly hope that it's not the best that I'll ever be capable of.

**CRASH: Do portions of it make you cringe and wish that you hadn't done them the way that you had done them?**

BROWN: Sure.

**CRASH: Even portions that ended up appearing in the definitive edition?**

BROWN: Yes, even those.

**CRASH: In your more recent work you have stepped entirely in the opposite direction in terms of the tone and certainly in terms of the visual impact. It has shifted from something which contained a certain amount of shock value to something which again visually contains almost none. Do you feel that some of the more shocking or more frightening imagery that you used in *Ed the Happy Clown* was essentially something that was building inside you as a relative youth in your twenties and that things like that really do not have much place in a serious, sophisticated work?**

BROWN: Hmm...

**CRASH: What I mean to get at is that**

JOSIE DISPLEASED, FROM *ED THE HAPPY CLOWN*

ONE OF JULIE DOUCET'S INFLUENTIAL DREAM STRIPS

SEPT. 15TH, 1988
PLEASE WAKE UP MR MATT.
AHEM!
WHAT AM I DOING BACK IN HIGH SCHOOL?! THERE'S BEEN A MISTAKE!! I DON'T BELONG HERE!! I DID MY TIME!! HELP!
RECURRING NIGHTMARE
ZZZ

JOE MATT'S *PEEP SHOW*

**there is a general feeling that graphic imagery is used for oftentimes exploitative purposes. Without getting too much into specifics, I think it's fair to say that right from the days of Homer, western art and literature has featured many examples of elevated works containing shocking images that were integral to the work. I suppose I'm saying it's possible to strike *this* balance. Do you feel that the shock value contained in *Ed the Happy Clown* was exploitative or gratuitous or that it was essential to the story?**

BROWN: I hope the latter... Yeah, it's hard for me to say.

**CRASH: Now, when the definitive edition appeared, you chopped out certain chapters.**

BROWN: Yes, I did.

**CRASH: Why did you choose to do that?**

BROWN: Well, my original plan for ***Yummy Fur*** was to keep using the Ed the Happy Clown character forever. Basically, he would be my Tin Tin or Asterix. He would be the character that I used to tell any story I wanted to tell. And for the rest of my life I would keep doing Ed the Happy Clown stories. At a certain point I lost steam with the character. I lost interest in doing stories with the character, but I kept doing stories anyway with Ed the Happy Clown because I didn't know what else to do. Those stories are basically the stories after issue twelve of ***Yummy Fur***. So those are the stories that I cut out of the final edition of ***Ed the Happy Clown***.

**CRASH: I find it interesting that as a result of this Josie's role in the story becomes more prominent. In fact, I would submit that Josie is the hero of *Ed the Happy Clown*...Josie's murder is the turning point of the story and what you did with it was to relay that sequence three different times: once in the third person, once with Ed being present and then finally once through Josie's perspective as her spirit rises from the body after she's been knifed and killed. Was this an intentional literary technique on your part to add more to that sequence from different points of view?**

BROWN: No, it just happened that way. I was making up the story as I went along and it just happened that I felt I had to retell it from different points of view.

**CRASH: Okay. I'd like to discuss Josie more a little bit later, but for now I want to slide into the autobiographical stuff if that's okay with you.**

BROWN: Sure.

## THE ROOTS OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

**CRASH: Other than Harvey Pekar's work, is there anything that you can point to that made you realize that you wanted to get away from doing the more phantasmagorical work that you had been engaged in, and do more personal work?**

BROWN: Well, there were a lot of cartoonists doing autobiographical work at that time.

**CRASH: Can you name some?**

BROWN: **Joe Matt**. **Colin Upton**. **Julie Doucet**, even though her stuff wasn't explicitly autobiographical. The fact that she showed the things that she really did using her own character from dreams and stuff is still to me autobiographical. Those are the names that come to me immediately. And this work was what interested me most at the time.

**CRASH: Did it interest you in the sense that you thought that there was potential in this area, that there was material to be mined or was it that you felt that the work specifically of Joe Matt, Julie Doucet and Colin Upton was so good, so impressive that you wanted to be a part of that milieu?**

BROWN: I certainly felt that it seemed to be a rich area to be mined.

**CRASH: Did you feel that their work was doing enough? Did you feel that their work was important and significant and that they were achieving something that no one else was doing?**

BROWN: Yes.

**CRASH: Do you feel today, looking back, that that work holds up?**

BROWN: I still like most of it. It doesn't read the same as it did when I first read it, that's for sure. You do see it in a different light. I've seen a lot of autobiographical comics since then. So, does it hold up? Well, probably not as well as I'd like it to.

**CRASH: Do you feel that Pekar's work of the time still holds up?**

BROWN: Yes.

**CRASH: So, would you regard Harvey's work as being the most important, the most pivotal in terms of your move into that area?**

BROWN: No, it wasn't. It was actually more **Joe Matt** or **Julie Doucet**.

**CRASH: That's frightening, Chester.**

BROWN: (Laughs) At the time it just seemed...I had experienced two prior examples of autobiographical cartoonist comics before this group came along: **Harvey Pekar** and **Robert Crumb**...

**CRASH: What about Justin Green and Aline Kominsky?**

BROWN: For some reason I wasn't thinking about them. I was aware of their work, but when I thought of autobiographical comics I just thought of Pekar and Crumb.

**CRASH: I'm actually fairly surprised. I guess I had always imagined that Green's work which included a lot of religious imagery would somehow have been a little more important to you than some of the others. I guess that wasn't the case.**

BROWN: No, I enjoyed ***Binky Brown meets the Holy Virgin Mary***, but I can't say it had a big influence on me. Getting back to Crumb and Pekar, it seemed like their territory to me. Autobiographical comics was what they did and there was no sense in anyone else bothering to try and do it. Things like ***Binky Brown*** or Aline's work seemed like a quirk. ***Binky Brown*** just seemed like one comic off at the side that was some sort of quirk of nature.

## THE CARTOON LIFE OF BROWN

**CRASH: Okay, looking back on your autobiographical stuff, I guess it's pretty easily broken down into three sections. There are the individual stories, of which there are four single issue stories. And then you have two longer narratives, the "Playboy Stories" which appeared as the book *The Plaboy* and "Fuck" which I assume is going to appear under the title *I Never Liked You.***

BROWN: That's right.

**CRASH: Now, the shorter pieces. There are two stories that deal with what I would call the 'crazy roomie' motif. This is something which is all too prevalent in autobiographical comics. Why is it that you wanted to do "Helder", which was your first story in the nineteenth issue of *Yummy Fur*, the first autobiographical story, and "Danny's Story" in the twenty-fifth issue, when there certainly were already quite a few people doing stories about either room-mates or co-workers they knew who were kind of crazy?**

BROWN: Were there that many 'crazy roomie' stories at that time?

**CRASH: Well, certainly Joe Matt had done some.**

BROWN: Joe had.

**CRASH: Harvey Pekar had done quite a lot about...**

BROWN: Crazy co-workers.

**CRASH: I guess my point is, we all know people like that. It's not particularly interesting I think to most people. Why did you feel that this was the kind of story that would be engaging or useful in the context of your autobiographical setting?**

BROWN: Well, you don't think this kind of stuff is interesting. At the time, I did. Although I'm not planning on doing any more, I'm still willing to see more, to use the term again, 'crazy roomie' stories if someone has an interesting story to tell.

**CRASH: Why aren't you going to do it?**

BROWN: Because let's just say I don't have any other interesting 'crazy roomie' stories.

**CRASH: Oh, come on Chester. Everybody's got something like that. That's the point.**

BROWN: It's true I have had other crazy roomies. It just wouldn't interest me to do another one. Having done two of them is enough.

**CRASH: Okay. This idea of eating your own snot in the twenty-fifth issue. Why did you feel the need to include that?**

BROWN: I was just showing my average morning and that's the kind of thing I do on an average morning.

**CRASH: Do you still do it?**

BROWN: Yeah, sure.

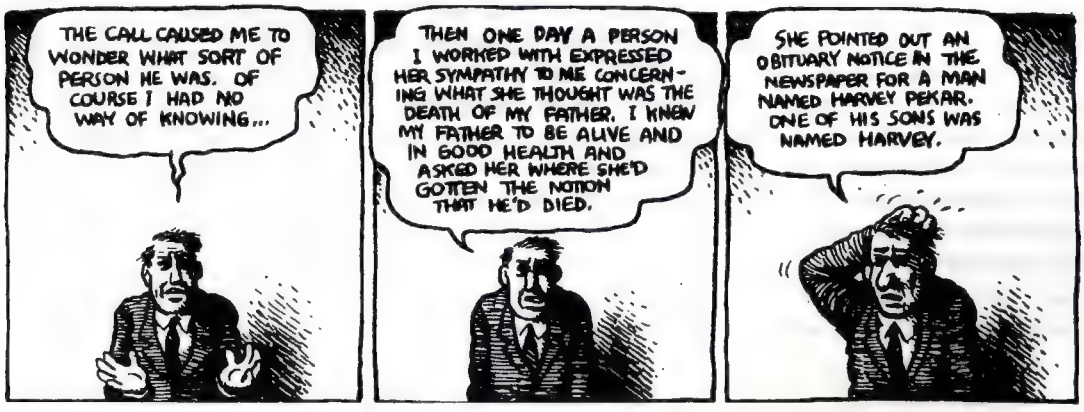
**CRASH: Do you do it in front of other people?**

BROWN: Only if they don't mind.

**CRASH: (laughing) Who in the fuck doesn't mind?**

BROWN: (laughing)

**CRASH: Who says, "Hey Chester, that's a tasty-looking booger you've got there, chew away"?**


THE CALL CAUSED ME TO WONDER WHAT SORT OF PERSON HE WAS. OF COURSE I HAD NO WAY OF KNOWING...
THEN ONE DAY A PERSON I WORKED WITH EXPRESSED HER SYMPATHY TO ME CONCERNING WHAT SHE THOUGHT WAS THE DEATH OF MY FATHER. I KNEW MY FATHER TO BE ALIVE AND IN GOOD HEALTH AND ASKED HER WHERE SHE'D GOTTEN THE NOTION THAT HE'D DIED.
SHE POINTED OUT AN OBITUARY NOTICE IN THE NEWSPAPER FOR A MAN NAMED HARVEY PEKAR. ONE OF HIS SONS WAS NAMED HARVEY.

WORDS BY PEKAR, PICTURES BY CRUMB FROM *AMERICAN SPLENDOR*

BROWN: Well, they don't mind if they do it themselves.

**CRASH: Okay, so you and Joe Matt are sitting there having a snot-feast. Other than the two of you, is there anybody else who is not totally repulsed by this?**

BROWN: Uh, no.

**CRASH: So other than this need to create that which approaches 'realism', why would you include something like that?**

BROWN: But why not though?

**CRASH: Because it's not central to what it is you're trying to do. There will be the perception that you're doing it for some nominal level of shock value.**

BROWN: I suppose there is that possibility.

**CRASH: Do you feel that you're including it for that reason?**

BROWN: No. When I was growing up, it always seemed to me that what I wanted to do when I became an artist, was to show life the way I thought it really was. This was my intention. As you actually become an artist you realize how impossible this is. But still there's a feeling that there are certain things in life that you show and certain things that you don't show, and I don't want to follow those rules.

**CRASH: What you're saying though is that you're including these things not because they are significant to what you're otherwise doing, but only as a reaction to that which you've been exposed in the past.**

BROWN: Yes. Do you feel that's bad?

**CRASH: Yes it is because it's a reactionary move, consciously going against that which has gone before. It may blind you to what you are otherwise trying to express.**

BROWN: But it is a part of what I'm trying to express.

**CRASH: But, is it not a side-bar to everything, an irrelevant aside? You seem to be saying "I can do this, so why not?" even if it doesn't contribute to anything else.**

BROWN: And if it doesn't, why is that bad?

**CRASH: Well, I don't know. I guess it comes down to your theory of writing and telling a story. I guess my impression is, if you are going to include something like that, then it should be in some way progressive or integral to the story. To give you an example, if you're writing a story about problems that you're having with a brother of yours who is wacked out on drugs and in this story you depict yourself waking up in the morning and figure that, *just because you can do it*, you show yourself in 13 or 14 consecutive panells popping zits off your forehead onto the mirror of your bathroom and then maybe licking up the pus. That may be what you did that morning, that may be what you do on a regular morning, but I don't see how it's significant to the story that you're trying to tell. In other words, it ends up being a cheap gimmick designed to express something which is, again, nominally shocking, so why include it?**

BROWN: (clearing his throat)

**CRASH: Did not your fellow cartoonist, Seth, say that he attempted to dissuade you for weeks not to include that?**

BROWN: Yes, he did.

**CRASH: How was it that his arguments and the ones that I have just presented not effect you, or why do you not consider them valid?**

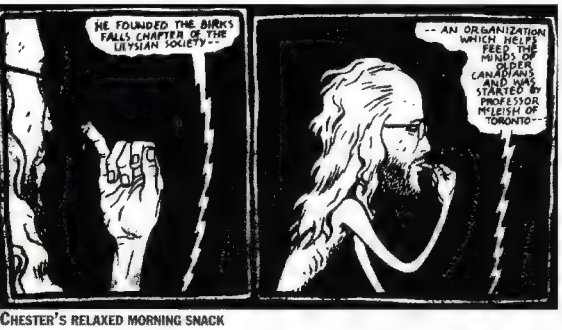
BROWN: Well, when you do a story, to me there's a story you want to tell, and there's also whatever else you want to do with your art. And if you just concentrate on telling whatever story you're telling that's fine, but any given story can be told in a number of ways. If you expand your parameters, for instance, you're not just telling your story, you're also talking about life, about how you see the world around you.

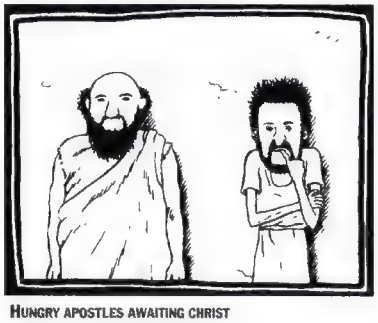
**CRASH: Chester, it just made no**

JUSTIN GREEN'S *BINKY BROWN:* NOT A BIG INFLUENCE

**"When I was growing up, it always seemed to me that what I wanted to do when I became an artist, was to show life the way I thought it really was. As you actually become an artist, you realize how impossible this is."**

FROM "HELDER": A CONFRONTATIONAL MOMENT


HE FOUNDED THE BIRKS FALLS CHAPTER OF THE LILYSIAN SOCIETY--
-- AN ORGANIZATION WHICH HELPS FEED THE MINDS OF OLDER CANADIANS AND WAS STARTED BY PROFESSOR McLEISH OF TORONTO--
CHESTER'S RELAXED MORNING SNACK


HUNGRY APOSTLES AWAITING CHRIST

**sense in any context.**

BROWN: Well, it made sense to me. I wanted to show myself just relaxing before being interrupted by this annoying person. So to me this is just showing myself enjoying my morning slowly before this happened, before this person barges in.

**CRASH: So, looking back at this point you're satisfied with including something like that in your story?**

BROWN: Yes.

**CRASH: And I guess you would have no hesitation about including it again especially since you did when a couple of characters in a later Bible adaptation pull snot out of their noses and consume it.**

BROWN: Yeah. That was just to annoy people like you, Steve.

**CRASH: Well, you know what? It worked.**

BROWN: (laughing)

**CRASH: I found it absolutely ridiculous. And if that's the case, then it invalidates what you're doing.**

BROWN: Yeah.

**CRASH: So, you're content doing work that is not valid?**

BROWN: Okay, there was another reason for it. In the last "Matthew" sequence in which I used it the apostles are hanging around outside while Jesus inside heals someone. I didn't want to show the healing. So, I needed to show something to pass the time on the outside while Jesus heals the character inside. That action sufficed. I could have had them standing there doing nothing, but having them eat their snot was just as good as having them do nothing.

**CRASH: I suppose to some. Okay, I just wanted to switch to the twentieth issue of *Yummy Fur*, "Showing Helder". How does that stand up in your mind at this point?**

BROWN: Not very well. I'm not that crazy about that piece.

**CRASH: Why do you say that? I think you know I rather like it.**

BROWN: Yeah. It just seems to me kind of on the weak side. It basically started out with an anecdote, telling this anecdote about my friend Kris' reaction to that issue of ***Yummy Fur***. It seemed like an amusing anecdote and since it seemed like an amusing anecdote I figured it would make an interesting comic book story. My feeling now is that it didn't make an interesting comic book story, but I guess it did for you.

**CRASH: Well, there were aspects of it that I enjoyed. I enjoyed the way that you expressed the panic that you felt in some situations - the insecurity inherent in the creative process, switching from doing work in an area that you had been successful at, and trying to do something new...**

BROWN: I certainly don't want to disagree with you...

**CRASH: Well, you can certainly disagree with me if you feel that the issue is sub-par. Will this issue be reprinted?**

BROWN: I am more displeased with it than I am pleased. I hope that on some level anything I do has merit. But, no I don't think that piece has enough merit that I'm willing to reprint it.

**CRASH: The twentyfourth issue of Yummy Fur, "The Little Man", is an amusing little story. Not a great story by any stretch, but a good story. I think the thing that drove me crazy about it was the little epilogue.**

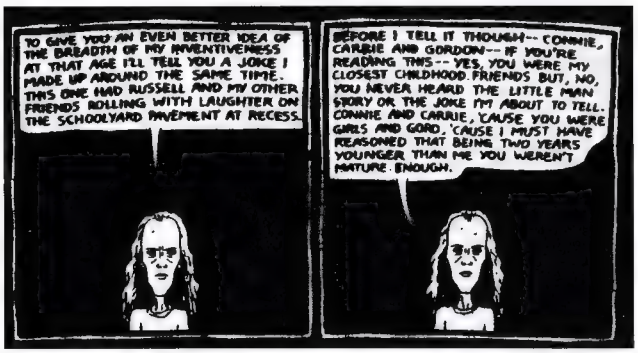
BROWN: Yeah, that bugs me too now. When I do reprint that story, I'm dropping that epilogue.

**CRASH: In that epilogue you speak directly to certain people who were depicted in that story.**

BROWN: Yes.

**CRASH: Is that the problem with the epilogue? Or is it that you're speaking to the audience?**

BROWN: I think the problem is that I'm basically assuming that the reader hasn't figured out certain things and I'm hitting them over the head to explain the story.


TO GIVE YOU AN EVEN BETTER IDEA OF THE DARADTH OF MY INVENTIVENESS AT THAT AGE I'LL TELL YOU A JOKE I MADE UP AROUND THE SAME TIME. THIS ONE HAD RUSSELL AND MY OTHER FRIENDS ROLLING WITH LAUGHTER ON THE SCHOOLYARD PAVEMENT AT RECESS.
BEFORE I TELL IT THOUGH-- CONNIE, CARRIE AND GORDON-- IF YOU'RE READING THIS-- YES, YOU WERE MY CLOSEST CHILDHOOD FRIENDS BUT, NO, YOU NEVER HEARD THE LITTLE MAN STORY OR THE JOKE I'M ABOUT TO TELL. CONNIE AND CARRIE, 'CAUSE YOU WERE GIRLS AND GORD, 'CAUSE I MUST HAVE REASONED THAT BEING TWO YEARS YOUNGER THAN ME YOU WEREN'T MATURE ENOUGH.

THE EPILOGUE TO "THE LITTLE MAN": HITTING THE READER OVER THE HEAD

"SHOWING HELDER": "... NOT CRAZY ABOUT THAT PIECE."

## *THE PLAYBOY* AND "FUCK"

**CRASH: Okay. I'm glad you brought that up because that leads us right into *The Playboy*, which I think you know, I am not a big fan of. I believe that it sort of breaks a cardinal rule of visual art which I can put into three words: show, don't tell. And what you do in that story is to juxtapose a very stoic, quiet character, yourself at an earlier age, with a very goofy, chatterbox-like winged narrator. Did you feel it was necessary to include the narrator throughout the strip because your character was so quiet and you felt that you needed him to progress the story?**

BROWN: Well, I could have handled it different ways. The winged character basically is a narrator. I could have had narration in blocked text within the panells instead of having the winged character say these things. It seemed to me that having a character within the story narrate it was going to be a more interesting and involving way of telling the story.

**CRASH: Again, we will be going into this later but in "Fuck" there was very little in the way of narration. And yet the story was told just the same, and in my estimation, infinitely better. Do you feel that the narration in *The Playboy* was useful? And did you feel that it worked within the context of the story that you were trying to tell seeing as how you eliminated it from your next major narrative?**

BROWN: Looking back now, I think that possibly I could have told ***The Playboy*** without at least that much narration. What can I say? You learn as you go along.

**CRASH: When you used the winged character as the narrator, in the first part of the story it was essentially third person narration, he spoke about the young Chester, and was attempting to be smart-assed and clever. In the second part of the story the winged character's persona changes and his dialogue becomes a first person narration where he refers to things that he did as the young Chester. So it flips from a third person narration to a first person narration. Was this intentional on your part and why did you do it that way?**

BROWN: It was intentional. It seemed to me in the second part things speed up, the narrator takes over even more, and it's because I knew that the winged character wasn't going to be interacting with the action as much, it seemed the more natural way to do it.

**CRASH: The winged character in the second portion is chronicalling events, giving you times, dates, situations. Were you attempting to achieve a diary - type effect?**

BROWN: Hmn, was I trying to create a diary like effect? No...

**CRASH: Were you pressed for space?**

BROWN: I wasn't pressed for space, but because so much of the second part deals with repetetive actions I felt that if I showed them in the same sort of detail that I had shown the action in the first part it would become dull. So I felt that this was the best way to show it, giving more of an overview over time.

**CRASH: Okay. *The Playboy* had two epilogues. The first features you speaking with [Toronto Writer] Mark Askwith, where you went to great pains to also speak to the audience. Do you feel that this was worthwhile, or necessary?**

BROWN: Obviously, I did.

**CRASH: What are the benefits of speaking directly to the audience? Isn't it just as bad as the epilogue at the end of the twenty-fourth issue where you're sledgehammering home irrelevant information?**

BROWN: That epilogue did seem to me to be necessary. I was basically showing how I was saying one thing and thinking another thing. The audience wouldn't have known the information that I was saying through the winged character in that scene. It had to be conveyed in some way. Having the winged character speak directly to the audience was the way I chose.

**CRASH: But, don't you think it's a little too cliquey to be referring to how Mark is going to react to this after he reads it?**

BROWN: Hmm...

**CRASH: When you speak directly to the audience in your work, do**

DON'T YOU EVER USE THAT WORD AGAIN ! DO YOU HEAR ME ?!
I NEVER WANT TO HEAR YOU SAY THAT WORD AGAIN !
MY MOM IS A BIT ON THE EMOTIONAL SIDE BUT THIS IS STILL UNUSUAL BEHAVIOUR FOR HER.
IN FACT I'VE NEVER SEEN HER ANGRIER. THIS IS OBVIOUSLY THE WORST THING I'VE EVER DONE.
CHESTER LEARNS THAT 'SHIT' IS A VERY BAD WORD...

... AND THAT SHORT FORMS CAN BE PROBLEMATIC AS WELL.

desire inside you, unless you're forced to do it for financial reasons. But in ***Yummy Fur,*** or at least in my work, I've hopefully avoided having to do things purely for commercial reasons. I've been able to find myself in a situation where basically I've been allowed to do whatever I wanted to do.

**CRASH: Does reason come into the equation at all?**

BROWN: Obviously your reasoning powers have some influence on the work you do.

**CRASH: Did you use any reasoning powers before you decided to print this story?**

BROWN: Well, I felt I did.

**CRASH: The last issue of *Yummy Fur* was the all-gosptel issue. Do you intend to finish all the Gospels?**

BROWN: Well we'll take them one at a time. I'm going to finish "Matthew" and then we'll see about "Luke" and "John."

**CRASH: Has your interest in the Gospel work waned?**

BROWN: It wanes and then gets revived again.

**CRASH: I liked the all-gospel thirty-second issue.**

BROWN: Good. Thanks.

## RACISM & ROBERT CRUMB

**CRASH: Okay, Chester, I wanted to backtrack slightly here. One of the things that you didn't include in *The Playboy* book was a one page prologue called "Racism", which did appear originally in the comics.**

BROWN: Right.

**CRASH: It has to do with children using the word "nigger". Later on in that very same issue, the winged character refers to a situation where you feel guilty about not masturbating to a black model. Why didn't you include the racism story in *The Playboy* collection?**

BROWN: I didn't include it because in the whole work, ***The Playboy***, the subject of racism isn't really dealt with that much and using that piece as a prologue to that story makes it seem like this story is going to be more about racism than it actually is.

**CRASH: Was your original intention to have it more thematically linked to racism?**

BROWN: No, it wasn't.

**CRASH: You've stated earlier that you believe that all information should be allowed to be freely disseminated. I take it then you believe that those who deny the existence of the holocaust should be allowed the same right to speak as those who would suggest that six million did in fact die during the second world war?**

BROWN: Yeah, sure.

**CRASH: Do you believe that suggesting that the holocaust did not exist is in and of itself a form of racism or rather anti-semitism?**

BROWN: Not necessarily...but probably I would take a second look at that point at anyone who did express that as an opinion. I would be curious about their stand on anti-semitism.

**CRASH: In the latest issue of *Weirdo* which has been banned in Canada, Robert Crumb does a two part story: "When the Niggers take over America" followed by "When the Goddamn Jews take over America". What was your impression of those two stories? And do you believe that they were satirical in any way?**

BROWN: I believe that the satirical intent was pretty obvious, especially taking into consideration the ending. I don't think Crumb really does want the Christian people to rise up and blow up the world.

**CRASH: But Canada Customs and the powers that be have deemed it a work of "hate literature".**

BROWN: That's because Canada Customs takes things too literally and have difficulty seeing satirical intent.

**CRASH: Yet, even if it were a work of overt racism, you still don't feel that it should be banned?**

BROWN: Nope. Even *if* the intent was to insight white people to kill blacks, or the opposite, I don't think it should have been banned.

## HEROINE OF A THOUSAND FACES

**CRASH: In your two main narratives, "Fuck" and *Ed, the Happy Clown*, I find it interesting that both are populated by strong female characters and fairly wishy-washy male characters. In fact, I would submit that, respectively, the characters Carrie and Josie are the real protagonists of those works. In "Fuck", things happen to you as the 'young Chester', events take place, but in the end little has changed. Carrie, on the other hand, is more of the aggressive 'hero' type who goes through the classic spritual transformation. The story essentially ends with her walking hand in hand with another boy after having spent most of the story infatuated with you. She's a different person. She's gained an understanding and progressd. Similarly in *Ed*, Josie is the aggressor. Ed doesn't do very much. She goes through many transformations, her actions become the focal point of the book, while Ed is merely carried away by events he has no control over. Even the new ending you wrote for the definitive edition of *Ed* features the denoument of Josie's rather than Ed's journey. Both female characters adhere more closely to the precepts of the classic heroic, mythic quest. Were these considered and intentional moves on your part?**

BROWN: No, it wasn't intentional. It just happened that way I guess.

**CRASH: Do you recognize or acknowledge this as being the case though?**

BROWN: I recognize it when you say it. I'm not going to deny it. I hadn't considered that before you brought it to my attention.

**CRASH: I'm glad I'm here to help you, Chester.**

BROWN: (laughs)

**CRASH: That's interesting because it brings us to what you're about to be doing, which is the new comic called *Underwater*. Correct?**

BROWN: Yeah, that's right.

## UNDERWATER IN VANCOUVER

**CRASH: Can you tell me even briefly what it's going to be about. I understand it concerns a week in the life of a woman. Is that a fair, general assessment?**

BROWN: Well, as I've been working on it in the preliminary stages, it's changed a bit. It no longer takes place in a week. It takes place over a longer period of time than that, over the course of a few weeks.

**CRASH: But your protagonist is a female.**

BROWN: Yes, she's still a female.

**CRASH: Are you going to attempt to use any kind of stream-of-consciousness approach that reveals her thoughts to us?**

BROWN: The main character won't be...You're going to have to figure out what she's thinking or even what she's actually saying and doing. I'm not sure if I'm going to eliminate thought balloons completely, but if I have them they'll be used minimally.

**CRASH: Will there be narration on the level that we're used to in some of your other work?**

BROWN: No. No narration.

**CRASH: Well done! Was it a reasoned, conscious choice on your part to do, strictly speaking, a female lead? Or is this just something that compelled you in a non-rational way?**

BROWN: It was in a non-rational way, although there was a rational component. Having just done autobiographical stories, I wanted to get as far away from myself as possible, and making the character female seemed to make sense in that way.

**CRASH: That gets pretty far away. What makes you think you can write for a woman?**

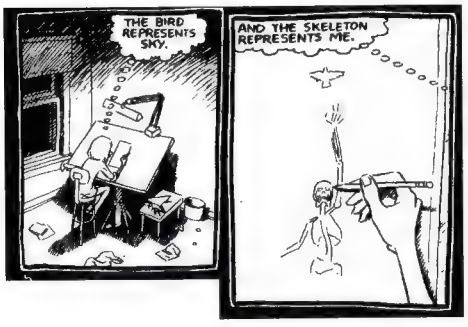
BROWN: Well...

**CRASH: Do you believe that it is -**

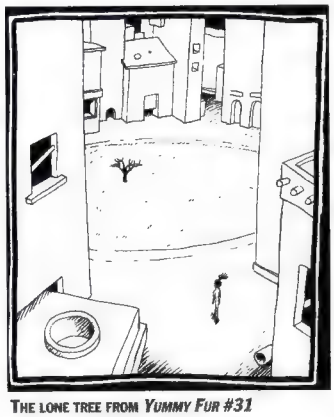
BROWN: Well, the thing is, if you're going to write fiction you're going to have to write female characters anyway, whether they're the main character or not. That is, unless you're going to populate your stories entirely with males.

**CRASH: Do you not imagine a great difference between writing a male character and writing a**

**"...whenever you do a piece you're compelled to do it because of a desire inside you unless you're forced to do it for financial reasons."**

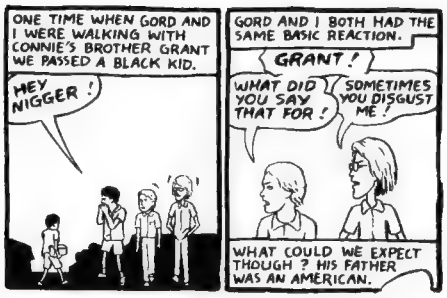



TWO MOMENTS FROM "FUCK": THE CREATIVE IMPULSE AND THE EVEN MORE CREATIVE EXPLANATION

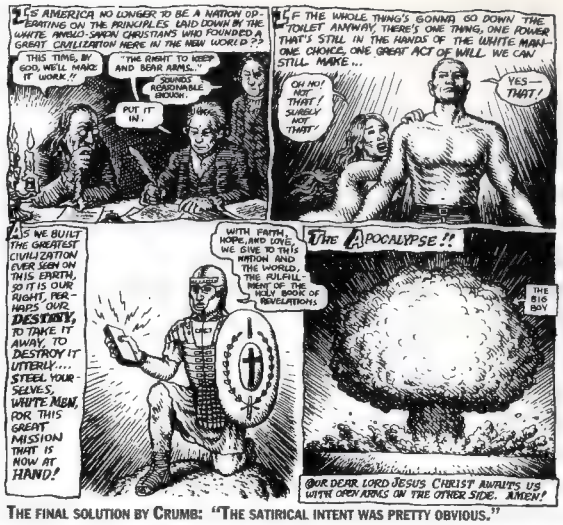


THE LONE TREE FROM *YUMMY FUR #31*

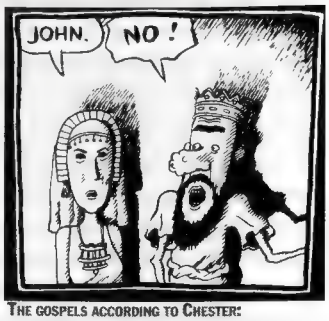
A LOVE LETTER DEDICATION: CHESTER TO SOOK-YIN


ONE TIME WHEN GORD AND I WERE WALKING WITH CONNIE'S BROTHER GRANT WE PASSED A BLACK KID.
HEY NIGGER !
GORD AND I BOTH HAD THE SAME BASIC REACTION.
GRANT !
WHAT DID YOU SAY THAT FOR !
SOMETIMES YOU DISGUST ME !
WHAT COULD WE EXPECT THOUGH ? HIS FATHER WAS AN AMERICAN.

TWO THINGS THAT GO HAND IN HAND: RACISM AND AMERICA


IS AMERICA NO LONGER TO BE A NATION OPERATING ON THE PRINCIPLES LAID DOWN BY THE WHITE ANGLO-SAXON CHRISTIANS WHO FOUNDED A GREAT CIVILIZATION HERE IN THE NEW WORLD ??
THIS TIME, BY GOD, WE'LL MAKE IT WORK !!
"THE RIGHT TO KEEP AND BEAR ARMS."
SOUNDS REASONABLE ENOUGH.
PUT IT IN.
IF THE WHOLE THING'S GONNA GO DOWN THE TOILET ANYWAY, THERE'S ONE THING, ONE POWER THAT'S STILL IN THE HANDS OF THE WHITE MAN— ONE CHOICE, ONE GREAT ACT OF WILL WE CAN STILL MAKE...
OH NO! NOT THAT! SURELY NOT THAT!
YES— THAT!
AS WE BUILT THE GREATEST CIVILIZATION EVER SEEN ON THIS EARTH, SO IT IS OUR FATE, PERHAPS OUR DESTINY, TO TAKE IT AWAY, TO DESTROY IT UTTERLY... STEEL YOURSELVES, WHITE MEN, FOR THIS GREAT MISSION THAT IS NOW AT HAND!
WITH FAITH, HOPE, AND LOVE, WE GIVE TO THIS NATION AND THE WORLD, THE FULFILLMENT OF THE HOLY BOOK OF REVELATIONS
THE APOCALYPSE !!
THE BIG BOY
@OR DEAR LORD JESUS CHRIST AWAITS US WITH OPEN ARMS ON THE OTHER SIDE. AMEN!

THE FINAL SOLUTION BY CRUMB: "THE SATIRICAL INTENT WAS PRETTY OBVIOUS."




THE GOSPELS ACCORDING TO CHESTER: A WANING AND REVIVING INTEREST

**female character as a protagonist?**

BROWN: Not a big difference. To me they're just human beings and I hope I can identify with women by the fact that both men and women are human.

**CRASH: Do you believe that there are any inherent differences between the genders?**

BROWN: There are differences between the genders, but hopefully they are differences that can be understood by the opposite gender. I think it *is* harder for men to write female characters and women to write male characters. It is going to be more difficult, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't try.

**CRASH: Let's look at someone who's tried and, I think most would agree, has succeeded in this regard, Jaime Hernandez of *Love & Rockets*. Does his stuff work for you?**

BROWN: Well, it doesn't *not* work. I'm not conscious of the relative success of his female portraits when I'm reading his work. I'm not thinking: "Boy, these women are written wrong!" To me it represents a certain point of view...

**CRASH: Are you hedging here a little bit, Chester? Are you less than pleased with Jaime's work?**

BROWN: Well, maybe I haven't enjoyed his more recent stories as much as I've enjoyed his work in the past.

**CRASH: Have you followed the work of male creators writing female protagonists in comics or in literature? Is this something that you studied in preparation for this?**

BROWN: No, I didn't do anything like that. I've certainly read books where a male writer has used a female lead character, but I wasn't consciously studying the work for possible inspiration later on.

**CRASH: So your approach will be to...**

BROWN: I'm pretty much not trying to worry about it so much. I'd agree that you should give it a greater degree of contemplation, but I am still basically going to wing it.

**CRASH: It seems to me that the women in your stories in general seem to be more thoughtful, more self-assured, less petty. Do you feel that women are morally superior to men?**

BROWN: No.

**CRASH: Do you feel that they have any sort of greater level of sensitivity or understanding about the human experience in reference to their ability to be mothers and nurturers?**

BROWN: I wouldn't say so because of them being mothers and nurturers. If they have a different perspective on things it's because society has generally treated them as second class citizens, and so that usually does give you a different perspective on things. And if one identifies with the underdog in a given situation, which I certainly do, then one can say that women might tend to see things more clearly in our society.

But I think that's more a situation of their status in society and not because women are by way of their biological make-up morally superior.

**CRASH: Do you feel that that follows in general to those who are not in an advantageous position. Do they have a perspective that has greater virtue?**

BROWN: Yeah, I think so.

**CRASH: Why do you as a person and a creator identify with the underdog as you just stated?**

BROWN: I don't know. It seems to me that there are injustices in our society that I believe should be rectified. I think our society should be a bit more equal in the way it treats everyone. Why I've come to that position, I don't know.

**CRASH: Do you empathize with the underdog?**

BROWN: Yeah, I suppose.

**CRASH: You feel that you've been in that position?**

BROWN: Sure.

**CRASH: How so? You're a white Anglo-Saxon male in a society that treasures white Anglo-Saxon males. How in the world**

**"...Having just done autobiographical stories, I wanted to get as far away from myself as possible, and making the character female seemed to make sense in that way."**

**could you consider yourself an underdog?**
BROWN: Certainly in my adolescent years I felt very much like I was in an underdog position, an outsider position in relation to the other white males of my age group. So I suppose I can identify in that way, which is trivial in comparison to the kinds of things that some people in our society have to undergo.
**CRASH: Was there ever a social situation that you've been comfortable with?**
BROWN: At any time in my life?
**CRASH: Yes.**
BROWN: Sure. When living in Toronto, I had a close circle of friends, some of whom were involved in the comic book industry and I suppose in the larger comic book community, I feel somewhat comfortable. I've been accepted as a creator of some merit. I suppose as an artist I feel comfortable.
**CRASH: I guess when you were in Toronto you felt your experience with Joe Matt and Seth was positive and you enjoyed the artistic give-and-take as well as the social aspect of your relationship. Your personal relationship with Sook-Yin Lee is something which at this point is relatively new. You've been seeing each other for about a year now?**
BROWN: Yes, a little over a year.
**CRASH: Has this relationship radically changed the way you now view your life or your work?**
BROWN: Yes, definitely. In terms of my work, it's easier in the sense that once I got involved, I found a whole bunch of new ideas coming to me. Basically the story of ***Underwater*** came to me after my relationship had begun. As well, other story ideas came to me. It's been beneficial in that way. But when you are in a relationship you tend to get less work done. So, I've slowed down a bit. But, I should still be able to get out enough comics a year to satisfy the marketplace.

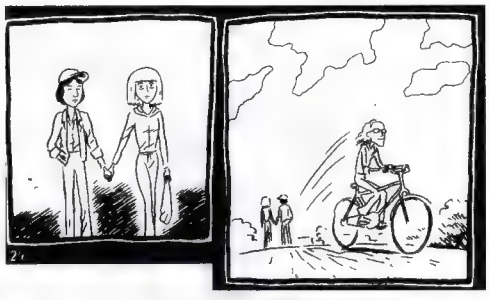
## THE PAST & FUTURE

**CRASH: About 3 or 4 years ago, your popularity was at its height. Anytime anybody spoke of the important cartoonists of the day, your name would invariably come up. Anytime there was an article in *Rolling Stone* or some mainstream publication, you would either be interviewed or referred to. That no longer seems to be the case. How do you feel about that?**
BROWN: Well, it's a natural process in the media. They've gone on to discover other cartoonists who are worthy of attention.
**CRASH: Do you feel slighted?**
BROWN: No, not really. I still feel that I'm getting enough attention that I don't feel I totally ignored.
**CRASH: Some people have questioned the wisdom of your move to autobiographical comics from your more fantastic work. Have you seen Woody Allen's *81/2* homage, *Stardust Memories?***
BROWN: Oh, yeah. Yeah, where everyone is interested in seeing him go back to his "earlier, funnier films".
**CRASH: Do you feel in some ways like the character in that film, that people are still hoping that you would go back to doing your "earlier, more fantastic" work.**
BROWN: Maybe a bit.
**CRASH: In the film, Allen's character implies with his reactions that he finds those remarks pestering, annoying, probably silly and uninformed. Are your views similar to his in reference to your experience?**
BROWN: Well, such thoughts do occur to me, I hate to admit it.
**CRASH: Yeah, I know you hate to admit it. That's why I'm asking you.**
BROWN: Honestly... If people enjoy anything by me I'm appreciative.
**CRASH: That's a nice safe answer. But do you feel that your most recent work is underappreciated and misunderstood by fans and**

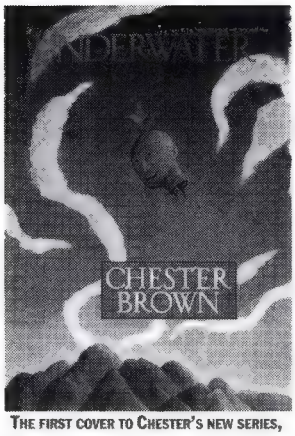
**"It seems to me that there are injustices in our society that I believe should be rectified. I think our society should be a bit more equal in the way it treats everyone."**

THE AGGRESSIVE CARRIE...

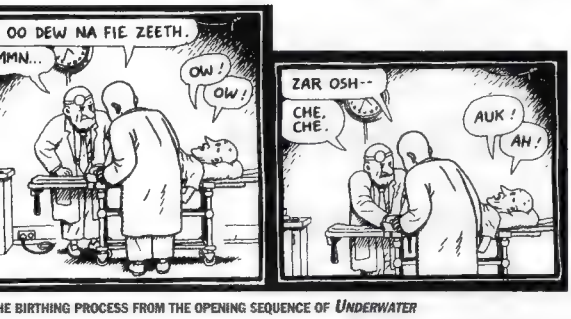
I'VE GOT IT. MY COUSIN JANET TOLD ME SHE BABYSITS HIS KIDS. SHE WAS IMPRESSED BECAUSE HE WORKS WITH THE MAYOR SO SHE WAS ALWAYS BRAGGING ABOUT IT.
THE PENSIVE JOSIE...


...FINDING A NEW LOVE

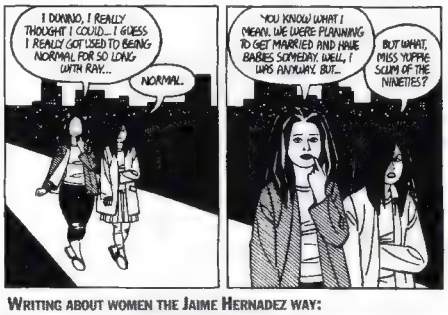
...MEETING A HORRIBLE END




THE FIRST COVER TO CHESTER'S NEW SERIES, *UNDERWATER*




HE BIRTHING PROCESS FROM THE OPENING SEQUENCE OF *UNDERWATER*


I DUNNO, I REALLY THOUGHT I COULD... I GUESS I REALLY GOT USED TO BEING NORMAL FOR SO LONG WITH RAY...
NORMAL.
YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN. WE WERE PLANNING TO GET MARRIED AND HAVE BABIES SOMEDAY. WELL, I WAS ANYWAY. BUT...
BUT WHAT, MISS YUPPIE SCUM OF THE NINETIES?

WRITING ABOUT WOMEN THE JAIME HERNADEZ WAY: MAGGIE AND HOPEY FROM *LOVE & ROCKETS*

That's a good idea! On your feet Greg. I need a partner.
I dunno.. I'm not too good with these slow songs...
See--it isn't so difficult
I guess not

SETH'S *PALOOKAVILLE*: "DOING ABOUT WHAT IT SHOULD."

**critics?**

BROWN: Sure, but why worry about it. My sales are high enough that I can live off of my art. What more could anyone want?

**CRASH: I don't know. Nothing, I suppose. For an artist that's about as good as it can get. If you don't have to wash dishes, pick worms or shovel shit, you should be thrilled that you can sit in front of a drawing board and have someone actually pay you to do it. But considering the state of the marketplace, are you unconcerned about the level to which work like yours, like Pekar's, even Seth's *Palookaville* are ignored or marginalized?**

BROWN: Well, it hadn't occured to me to think of it in that way. It certainly does seem that Harvey is underappreciated. Seth's ***Palookaville*** is, on the other hand, about at the level that one would expect it to be selling for a relatively new comic. Although I think it should be selling more. With the market as it is, realistically, it's doing about what it should.

**CRASH: Yet in the case of Julie Doucet's *Dirty Plotte* or even Joe Matt's *Peep Show*, two of Seth's contemporaries, the sales numbers are substantially better. Julie's stuff is trashy and violent, Joe's gimmicky and exaggerated. This isn't necessarily a value judgement. *Palookaville* avoids -**

BROWN: I know what you're saying. You're probably right. More subtle low-key work isn't going to sell as well as work that's more frantic or exaggerated. But that's always been the case. It's not a new trend. Pekar's work always stood out for that reason: the fact that it went against the grain of most other comics.

**CRASH: But if things ever get to the point where your work was being pushed out by other publications that were 'flashier', would you consider, well...**

BROWN: A new direction? I hope I wouldn't. I hope that I could remain free to do whatever type of work I want to do. But this is also my means of supporting myself. I can't really rule out the possibility of having to change my work. Actually, I'm glad that at this point I don't have to. I realize you have to live with whatever circumstance you find yourself in. But I *would not* be satisfied just doing inking on someone else's work [as Chester did for a lucrative venture last year, a comic book called ***1963***, published by Image Comics] or being forced to write and draw commercial mainstream comics - or whatever concessions, any commercial compromises I'd be forced to make. I'd always rather be free to choose what kind of story I want to tell.

**CRASH: Well, and thus far, fortunately for you, you have been. And I take it you're happy and content living in Vancouver? You're not thinking of moving back east anytime? Not that we necessarily want you.**

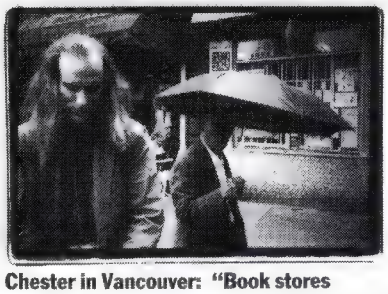
BROWN: (laughs) Occasionally Sook-Yin speculates on moving back to Toronto, but I'm happy here in Vancouver. The book stores aren't as good, but the weather's better.

**CRASH: And life for Chester Brown is much better now than it's ever been?**

BROWN: Yes, it is actually.

**CRASH: And how does the future look for your work?**

BROWN: I'm really excited about what I'm doing right now. I'm pleased in the direction I'm headed in and pleased with the work I'm doing.•



**Chester in Vancouver: "Book stores aren't as good, but the weather's better."**

# Cross Culture: STORYBOOK

Clemente Botelho

## THIS ISSUE SPOTLIGHTING...

**Skoal** A SHORT STORY BY **DANNY LEVY.**

PICTURES BY **MAURICE VELLEKOOP.**

On the night the kid with the gun came in the only other people in the bar were the nineteen year old sycophant and his hero, the six-foot two-inch bartender who also happened to own the place.

# skoal

Jake Langer had started coming here back when he was sixteen and there weren't many places he could get a beer without I.D., but now that he was of age and could drink wherever he wanted to it was the company of Big Mike Wyshynski that kept him coming back. Two or three nights a week would find him hanging out 'til closing time, sometimes even staying to help Mike sweep up and close the bar down. Then Mike would break out a bottle of Johnny Black and they'd sit telling stories underneath an imitation **Miller High Life** neon sign that said **Polish Low Life**. Beat the hell out of going home.

On the night the kid with the gun came in Jake was feel-

**•BY DANNY LEVY•**

ing kinda disappointed. He'd tried a few times to get a conversation going with Mike but Mike wasn't having any and would make simple answers and then go back to his paper, as if to say piss off, kid, you're bugging me. Jake had seen this before, though, and knew it was only temporary, nothing personal. The guy has moods is all, hell, everybody has moods, he figured, and so was just about to drink up and trudge home early when the kid came in with the gun.

He came in holding the gun commando style just like he'd seen Arnold do it in the movies, only this guy was skinny and pimply and the gun was probably his Dad's target rifle. He stood just inside the doorway, posing and giving the place a silent once-over and Jake could imagine him practicing the moves in front of a mirror. In fact, Jake was remarkably detached and even a bit amused by the guy, fuckin' Wally if he ever saw one, and then Wally marched right up and grabbed him by the collar with one hand and rammed the business end of the rifle against his head with the other, finger right on the trigger, and jake stopped feeling cocky. For a moment nobody moved or said anything, and then very calmly and without seeming to move a muscle Big Mike said, "I think you'd better tell us what you want."

The kid tried to sound tough. "I want your money, Fuckface," he said in a voice so nervous and squeaky that Jake actually felt sorry for him. "I want all the cash in a pile on the bar, fast. The register, your pockets, everything. That clear enough for you, Gran'pa?"

Big Mike nodded his head, twice, but that was all. He stayed right where he was, hands on the bar in front of him and staring Wally right in the eye. Finally he spoke.

"Okay," he said, "here's the deal. I'm gonna give you everything you want, all the cash, no problem. Okay? But first please point the gun away from the man's head. All right?"

Stalemate. Nobody moved. Jake felt the gun push harder into his temple for a second, and he remembered reading once that if someone holds a gun on you and actually touches you with the barrel then that's the best time to grab the gun and move quickly out of range, but although Jake could picture making the move in his mind, slick as Bruce Lee, he knew he'd never have the balls. He was thinking that's how he was gonna die, with Mike finding out he was a pussy after all, when Wally let him go, stepped back and pointed the gun at the ceiling again, finger still on the trigger. Mike blew out the breath he'd been holding.

"Okay, Gran'pa. No fucking around now. Open the register."

Mike nodded."Sure. But first, can I make a suggestion? Can I lock the door so no one else comes in and gets hurt? It's in your best interest to. I'll leave the key right in the..."

"NO!" the kid shouted. "Quit stalling, fuckface." He gestured at the register. "Gimme the money."

Jake would always remember the next bit happening in slow motion. Big Mike nodded again and then walked slowly over to the cash register taking pains to keep his hands in plain sight the whole time. He paused briefly to look up past Jake to where Wally was standing, then reached out and hit the button that made the till pop out with a loud ch-ching noise. Then he reached into the till, calmly pulled out a twenty-two caliber pistol and shot Wally right in the heart, the gun not making much more noise than the register had.

Jake's mind raced to catch up with what was happening. By the time he whirled around to look, Wally was dead in a crumpled pile on the floor, a thin two-inch trickle of blood leaking from his chest, a huge, growing piss-stain spreading down his right leg and the foul reek of fresh shit wafting up from his body. Jake felt dizzy and nauseous and an almost absurd sense of reality slipping away from him. He wanted to say and do a dozen different things at once but instead just kept staring at the body

and had just figured out that the sight was making him sick when his stomach rushed up in his throat and he fell to his knees and puked all over Wally's legs. By the time he was finished Mike had already put the gun away, locked the front and back doors of the bar and was standing over him, asking "You gonna be okay now?"

Scared, shaken and embarrassed as he was, Jake still wanted desperately to be cool, so instead of saying any of the things he wanted to he just sat back on his haunches, wiped his mouth on his sleeve and nodded, saying "Yeah, yeah, go ahead and call the cops."

That's when things got *really* weird.

"Nobody's gonna call any cops," Mike said. "Right now all I want you to do is get up and go sit on that stool over there and don't say or do anything else until I say so. Okay?"

Jake was dumfounded. "Holy shit, Mike, we gotta call the cops! I mean, you just shot a guy, for fuck's sake!"

Mike stood up to his full height and turned the same stare he had given Wally onto Jake. He didn't raise his voice, in fact lowered it a bit, but there was something in his tone that Jake was not about to fuck with. He said,"Jake. Listen very carefully. You are not going to ask any more questions. You are going to go and sit very quietly on that stool over there and not get in my way and when I'm all finished cleaning up we'll figure out what to do next then. For the first and last time, do you understand?"

**...and then Wally marched right up and grabbed him by the collar with one hand and rammed the business end of the rifle against his head with the other, finger right on the trigger, and Jake stopped feeling cocky.**

Jake didn't understand, in fact felt more scared now than he had with the gun to his head but he nodded and did as he was told. What the fuck was going on? He watched Mike disappear down the service stairs to the basement and then moments later come up again lugging a ten-foot rolled-up tube of carpeting behind him, not even breathing hard. Then the big man cleared some tables out of the way, unrolled the carpet on the floor, dragged the rifle, puke, and shit-stinking corpse over to the edge, and then went to work tying off and taping up the ends of the roll so that when he finished it looked like a party favor for the Jolly Green Giant. Moving methodically and efficiently, within ten minutes he had the loaded carpet roll propped up by the back door, his floor mopped clean and the tables back in place having barely broken a sweat, while Jake sat watching the whole time, sweating like a madman.

Just as Jake's mounting sense of unreality had reached critical mass Mike finished up and headed back behind the bar. "Okay," he said, "I don't want to fuck around here too long. I still got a lot to do before I can relax, but I know you're feeling pretty screwed up and reckon you deserve some explanations. So whaddya say we have one quick one before I send you home, huh? I'm buying."

Jake swallowed hard. "What the fuck is going on, Mike?"

Mike set two shot glasses down on the bar and filled them up with scotch. He put the bottle away, then turned and picked up one of the glasses and held it in front of him, looking straight at Jake with a small smile that showed more in his eyes than on his mouth. "Here's the deal, Jake," he said. "I know you're worried about calling the cops, but think about it: Guy comes in here holding a gun, threatens to kill unless I give him all my money. Instead, I pulled out my own gun and killed him. Bang. End of story. Now, I ask you: What the fuck has that got to do with anybody else? Skoal." He downed the scotch.

Jake pointed his finger and opened his mouth to answer when suddenly Mike's words sunk in and with the same startling effect as bright light being switched on in a cave. The epiphany was on him. What the fuck has that got to do with anybody else? For a few seconds Jake sat staring with his mouth hanging open and all his dozens of questions and fears melting away as the world took on a brand new and far more seductive shape. Once again something he'd once read came back to him with new meaning, something about scales falling from one's eyes, as suddenly literally dozens of unsolved moral dilemmas became very, very simple. He looked over to where Wally was rolled up by the back door and then back up at Mike and smiled. "Skoal," he said, downing the scotch, and as it burned its way down his chest he laughed and decided he felt older, much older. Twenty-three at least. Maybe even Twenty-four.

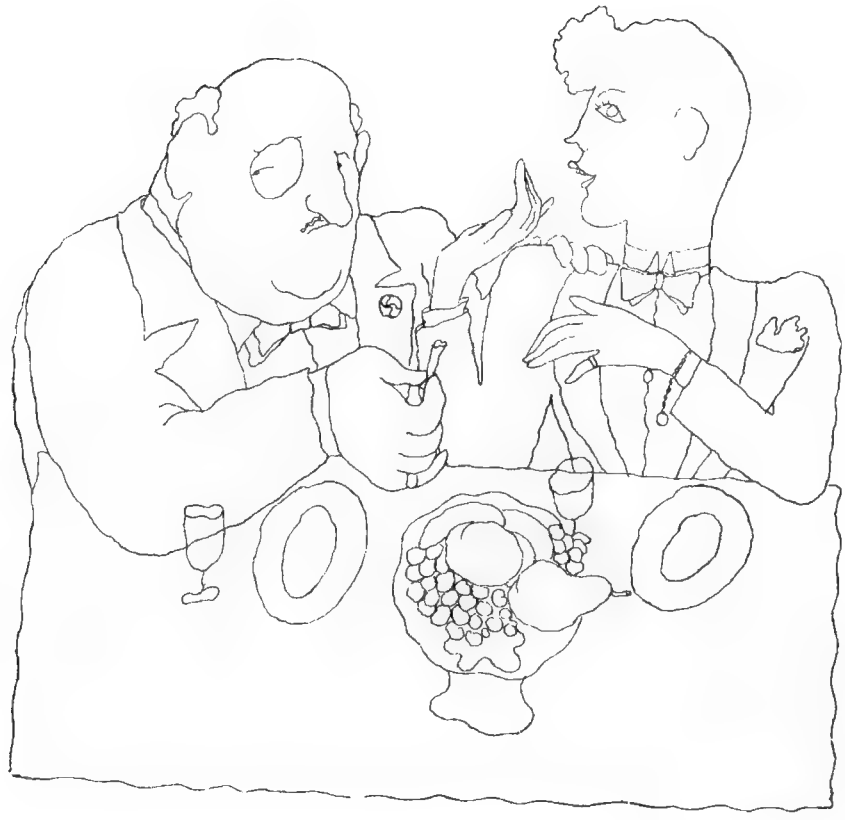
# the line drawings of Jean Cocteau

No word defines Jean Cocteau more appropriately than "poet". He was also a novelist, dramatist, essayist, film writer and director, producing work in virtually every medium of artistic expression including ceramics, mural decoration and musical composition. Yet his accomplishments as a "cartoonist" should not be overlooked.

Cocteau wrote two highly poetic novels, the most famous of these being ***Les Enfants Terribles***, a tale set in a fantasy world and revolving around the perverted rituals of a young brother and sister. In his theatrical play, ***Orphée***, he employs the theme of the divine poet in man and displays an ability to synthesize fragments of the characters' past and present. Years later, ***Orphée*** was adapted to film, joining Cocteau's already impressive list of accomplishments in this form which included the quasi-surrealist ***Le Sang d'un Poete (The Blood of a Poet)***. In its 1932 debut, this film drew enraged criticism from the Surrealists themselves who regarded ***Le Sang d'un Poete*** as an imitation of group-member Luis Bunuel's ***Un Chien Andalou***. The Surrealists were a rather provincial sort, regarding outsiders like Cocteau as charlatans and frauds. Cocteau remained apparently unfazed by this and other slights.

Among his many friends and admirers was Picasso, whose cubist work had a profound influence on Cocteau's visual aesthetic. ***Le Potomac***, a collection of prose and poetry organized around a series of drawings, created a peculiar mutation of a "comic-strip" and reflected on the ideas of cubist form and plane. In contrast to this book is ***Dessins*** (the source from which this section's illustrations are excerpted), where a similar sense of depth is absent. In this series of line drawings, subtitled "The Den of Iniquity," Cocteau uses simplistic draftsmanship and remnants of his poetic subconscious to create a semi-sequential story. These are frozen moments witnessed in a tavern by the author himself (there is a self-portrait looking back at us in the accompanying piece). The naiveté of these wicked cartoon images is summed up by Cocteau in his own words: "What is line? It is life."

by Vincent Aliberti



# SPECIAL ADVANCED PREVIEW:

***"You don't have to be a hero to get through, you just gotta keep breathing."***

**-Harvey Pekar from *Our Cancer Year***

Harvey Pekar had a better than average chance to beat cancer and he took it - kicking, screaming and complaining all the way. Obsessive/compulsive and self-defined by work, he at first refused to take sick leave, then convinced himself he was paralyzed. Or dying. His wife, Joyce Brabner, coaxed, bullied and dragged Harvey through endless - sometimes pointless - doctor visits. A woman with time for other people's problems, Joyce was too sure she could manage this "temporary" crisis alone. At least it wasn't AIDS.

As living with or surviving catastrophic illness becomes possible for more and more people, it's time to look past the stories we tell ourselves about inspired and courageous, "exceptional" patients. People with bad attitudes squeak by every day too, in a world that fails to stop spinning once they've been diagnosed. Worse things than cancer can happen to you, although that's knowledge no one can force upon another.

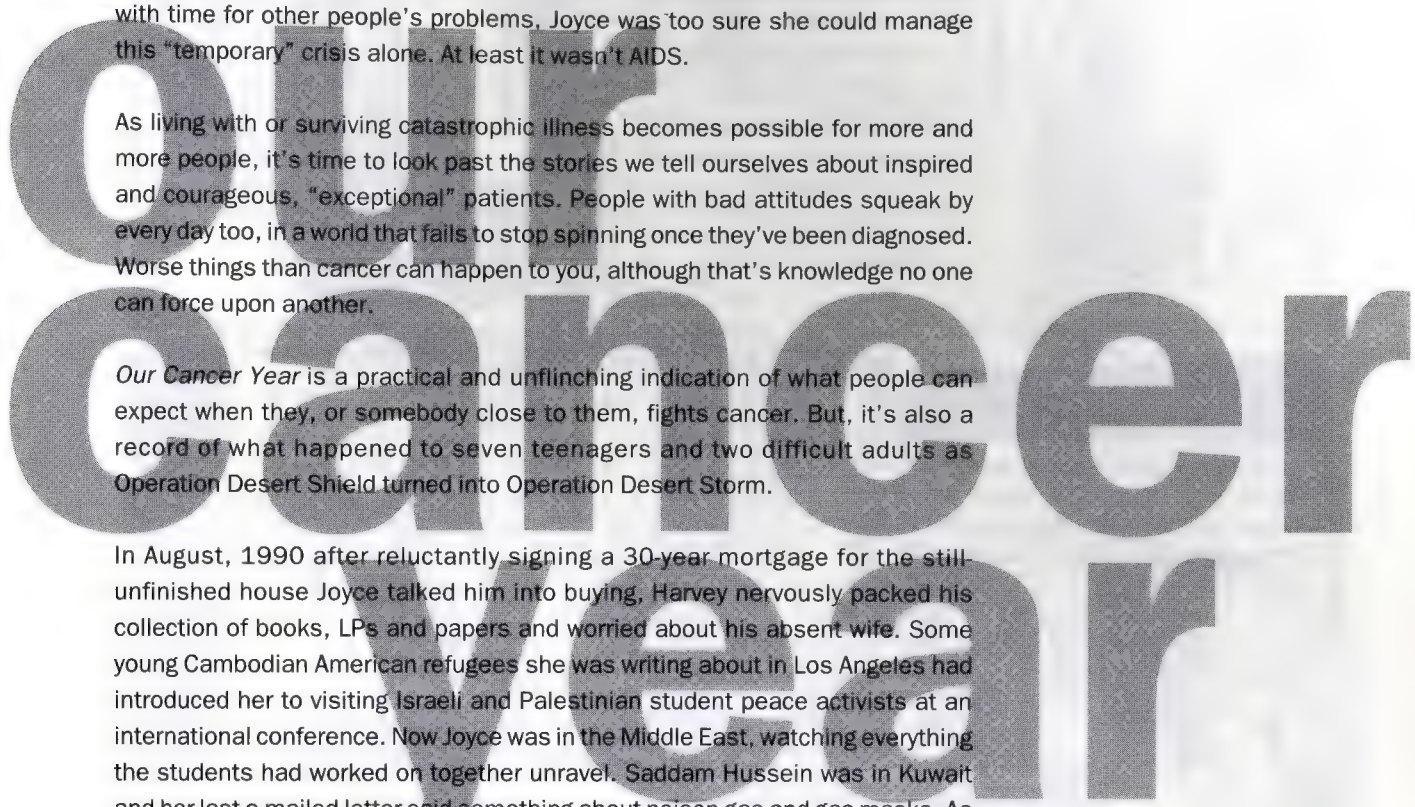
*Our Cancer Year* is a practical and unflinching indication of what people can expect when they, or somebody close to them, fights cancer. But, it's also a record of what happened to seven teenagers and two difficult adults as Operation Desert Shield turned into Operation Desert Storm.

In August, 1990 after reluctantly signing a 30-year mortgage for the still-unfinished house Joyce talked him into buying, Harvey nervously packed his collection of books, LPs and papers and worried about his absent wife. Some young Cambodian American refugees she was writing about in Los Angeles had introduced her to visiting Israeli and Palestinian student peace activists at an international conference. Now Joyce was in the Middle East, watching everything the students had worked on together unravel. Saddam Hussein was in Kuwait and her last e-mailed letter said something about poison gas and gas masks. As Harvey imagined the worst, a crazy contractor-turned-evangelist decided to save the Pekar/Brabner marriage by upping a $49.95 roof repair to $6,000. And, although Harvey tried to ignore it, a lump inside his thigh was thickening.

Joyce made it home in time to watch the Persian Gulf war on TV with Harvey. The battery powered computer and modem she left behind created a link that connected teenagers waiting for SCUD missiles to fall to their Cambodian American friends, survivors of the Cambodian-Vietnamese war and Pol Pot's "killing fields." As Harvey (with Joyce) endures surgery, brutal chemotherapy and daily radiation treatments, we also glimpse their young friends' lives, sharing flashbacks, fears and compassionate support. It becomes very important to keep a simple promise, "When all this is over, we will see each other again."

Illustrator Frank Stack is an award winning professor of art at the University of Missouri. He sometimes signs his comics "Foolbert Sturgeon" and has illustrated stories for Pekar's continuing autobiographical series, *American Splendor*. Stack's own books include *Dorman's Doggie*, *Amazons*, *Dr. Feelgood's Funnies* and *The Further Adventures of Jesus*.

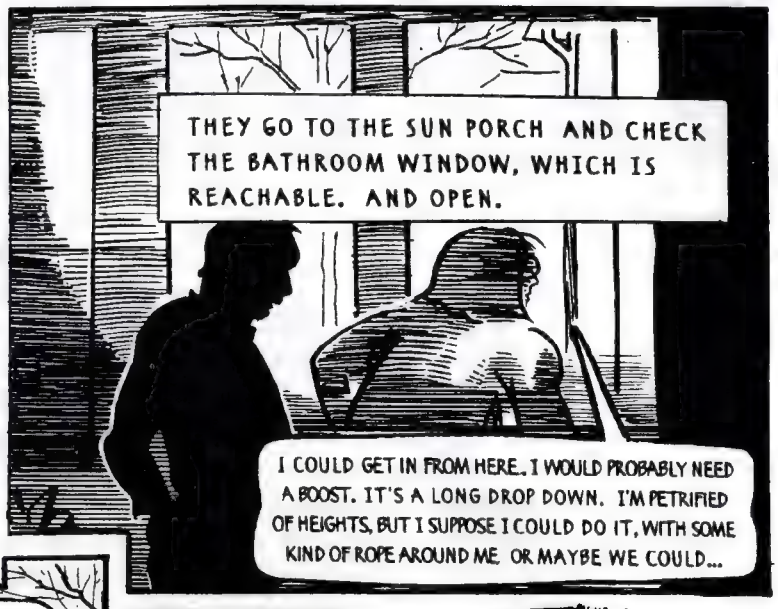
**•PUBLISHED BY FOUR WALLS EIGHT WINDOWS•**




**by Harvey Pekar & Joyce Brabner**

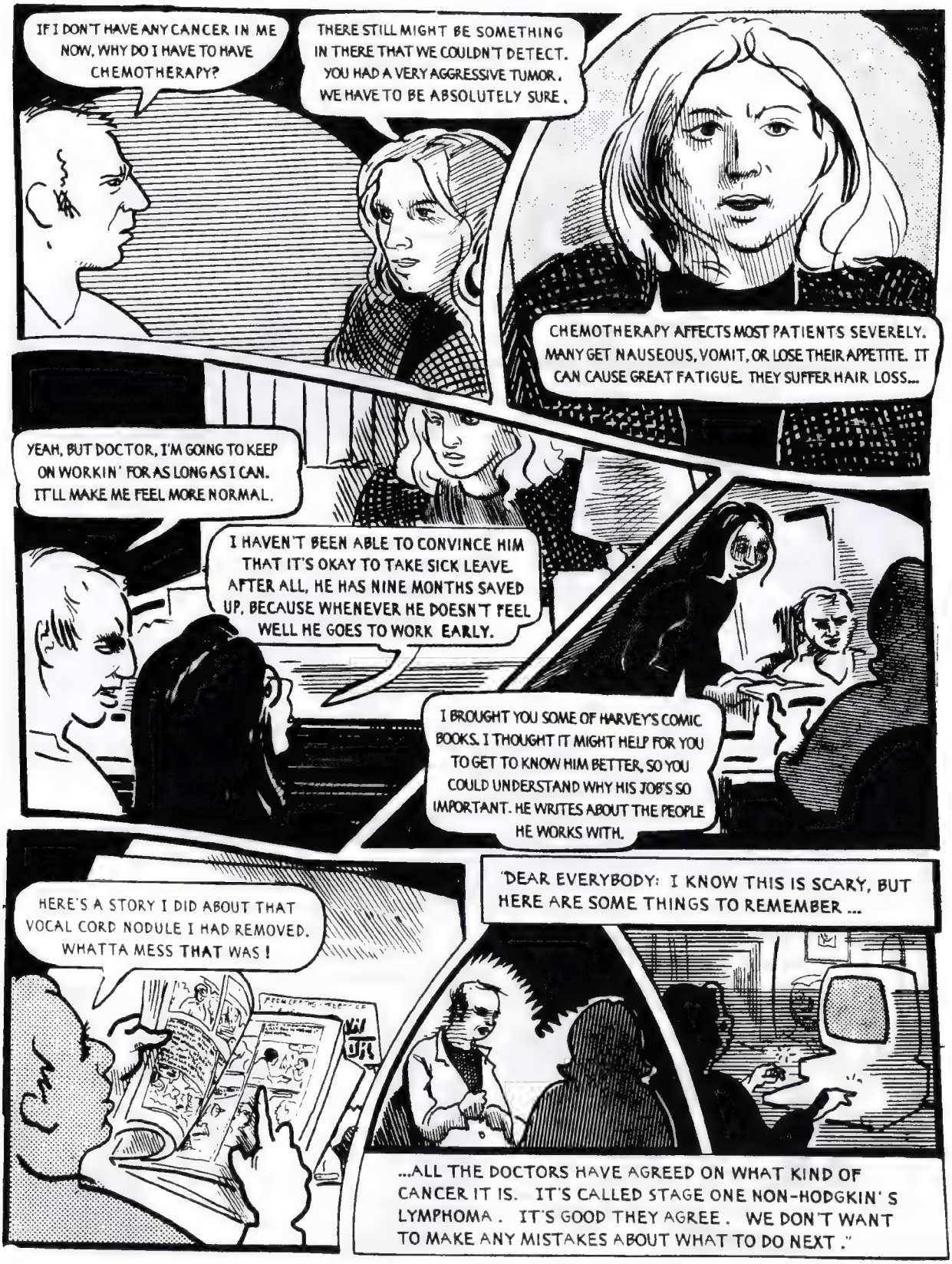
**Illustrations by Frank Stack**

THE WORK CREW HAS GONE HOME. HARVEY AND JOYCE DISCOVER THAT SOMEHOW, THE UPSTAIRS BATHROOM DOOR HAS BEEN ACCIDENTALLY LOCKED. BY THE WAY, THERE'S A SECOND BATH-ROOM. IT'S OPEN.


THEY GO TO THE SUN PORCH AND CHECK THE BATHROOM WINDOW, WHICH IS REACHABLE. AND OPEN.
I COULD GET IN FROM HERE. I WOULD PROBABLY NEED A BOOST. IT'S A LONG DROP DOWN. I'M PETRIFIED OF HEIGHTS, BUT I SUPPOSE I COULD DO IT, WITH SOME KIND OF ROPE AROUND ME. OR MAYBE WE COULD...

GOD DAMN YOU, HARVEY! GOD DAMN YOU! I SAID WAIT, WAIT! AND NOW YOU'RE GONNA FALL.
CRASH!
GREAT, JUST GREAT. WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO IF YOU GET KILLED, ASSHOLE?!?
"POLICE SAY THE VICTIM FELL . JUMPED OR WAS SHOVED. REPORTED DESPONDENT."
YOU COULD HAVE WAITED. I COULD HAVE FIGURED OUT SOMETHING SAFER. EASIER. WHY DID YOU DO IT?
BECAUSE YOU SAID YOU WERE GOING TO DO IT, AND IT WAS DANGEROUS. WHAT THE FUCK'S THE DIFFERENCE?
I ALREADY GOT CANCER
DAMN YOU! YOU'RE GONNA KILL YOURSELF BEFORE YOU EVEN GET A CHANCE TO DIE!

WHEN THEY VISIT THE ONCOLOGY CLINIC FOR THE FIRST TIME, ONE OF THE NURSES RECOGNIZES HARVEY.
OH MY, YES. WE'RE GONNA HAVE TROUBLE WITH THAT ONE. I USED TO WORK WITH HIM AT THE VA HOSPITAL. GETS HIMSELF ALL WOUND UP TIGHT.
DR. RHODES WILL BE HANDLING HARVEY'S CASE.
YES, I'D BE HAPPY TO SHARE YOUR SLIDES WITH ANOTHER DOCTOR, SO YOU CAN GET A SECOND OPINION. YOUR BIOPSY SHOWED THAT WE CAUGHT THE LYMPHOMA AT AN EARLY STAGE.
THIS FORM OF CANCER IS CURABLE. 85 PERCENT OF THE PATIENTS WHO COMPLETE TREATMENT GO INTO REMISSION. TWO-THIRDS OF THOSE PATIENTS HAVE NO FURTHER RECURRENCE. AFTER 5 YEARS, WE CONSIDER THEM FULLY CURED.
IF IT COMES BACK?
THERE WOULD STILL BE THINGS WE COULD DO TO CONTROL THE DISEASE. I'M GOING TO PRESCRIBE SOME FORM OF CHEMOTHERAPY.


IF I DON'T HAVE ANY CANCER IN ME NOW, WHY DO I HAVE TO HAVE CHEMOTHERAPY?
THERE STILL MIGHT BE SOMETHING IN THERE THAT WE COULDN'T DETECT. YOU HAD A VERY AGGRESSIVE TUMOR. WE HAVE TO BE ABSOLUTELY SURE.
CHEMOTHERAPY AFFECTS MOST PATIENTS SEVERELY. MANY GET NAUSEOUS, VOMIT, OR LOSE THEIR APPETITE. IT CAN CAUSE GREAT FATIGUE. THEY SUFFER HAIR LOSS...
YEAH, BUT DOCTOR, I'M GOING TO KEEP ON WORKIN' FOR AS LONG AS I CAN. IT'LL MAKE ME FEEL MORE NORMAL.
I HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO CONVINCE HIM THAT IT'S OKAY TO TAKE SICK LEAVE. AFTER ALL, HE HAS NINE MONTHS SAVED UP, BECAUSE WHENEVER HE DOESN'T FEEL WELL HE GOES TO WORK EARLY.
I BROUGHT YOU SOME OF HARVEY'S COMIC BOOKS. I THOUGHT IT MIGHT HELP FOR YOU TO GET TO KNOW HIM BETTER, SO YOU COULD UNDERSTAND WHY HIS JOB'S SO IMPORTANT. HE WRITES ABOUT THE PEOPLE HE WORKS WITH.
HERE'S A STORY I DID ABOUT THAT VOCAL CORD NODULE I HAD REMOVED. WHATTA MESS THAT WAS!
'DEAR EVERYBODY: I KNOW THIS IS SCARY, BUT HERE ARE SOME THINGS TO REMEMBER ...
...ALL THE DOCTORS HAVE AGREED ON WHAT KIND OF CANCER IT IS. IT'S CALLED STAGE ONE NON-HODGKIN'S LYMPHOMA. IT'S GOOD THEY AGREE. WE DON'T WANT TO MAKE ANY MISTAKES ABOUT WHAT TO DO NEXT."

"I LIKE DR. RHODES, BECAUSE SHE INVITES ME INTO THE EXAMINATION ROOM WHENEVER SHE EXAMINES HARVEY. IT'S GOOD FOR PEOPLE TO GO TOGETHER, BECAUSE THERE'S SO MANY THINGS TO THINK ABOUT AND REMEMBER."

"BUT, EVEN WHEN SHE'S ANSWERING MY QUESTIONS, SHE KEEPS HER EYES ON HARVEY. THAT'S SOMETHING ELSE I LIKE. AND, SHE HAS A B.A. IN LITERATURE FROM HARVARD! (THAT'S A FAMOUS AMERICAN UNIVERSITY, DANA.) THIS MEANS SHE AND HARVEY CAN ALSO TALK ABOUT BOOKS."

"KIMMIE, I KNOW YOU'VE HEARD THAT ROSALIE HAS CANCER, TOO. AND WE'RE ALL WORRIED ABOUT THIS WAR THAT'S PROBABLY GOING TO HAPPEN. BUT, YOU CAN'T BLAME YOURSELF EVERY TIME BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO PEOPLE YOU CARE ABOUT."

SAROEUM SAYS THAT'S A "CAMBODIAN" WAY OF THINKING, THAT LOTS OF KIDS FEEL GUILTY BECAUSE THEY SURVIVED, WHEN OTHERS DIDN'T. HE'S PROMISED TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT THIS HIMSELF, BECAUSE I DON'T KNOW ENOUGH. BUT, I CAN TELL YOU THIS..."

"WHENEVER I GET A LETTER FROM YOU, YOU MAKE ME FEEL BETTER."

AT HARVEY'S NEXT APPOINTMENT WITH DR. RHODES...

I WISH ALL MY PATIENTS COULD GIVE ME COMIC BOOKS ABOUT THEIR LIVES. NOW, I FEEL AS IF I REALLY KNOW YOU, AND I THINK THAT'S AN IMPORTANT PART OF WORKING TOGETHER.

YOU HAVE A CHOICE OF TWO COURSES OF TREATMENT. ONE IS GENTLER, BUT LONGER. YOU WOULD BE RECEIVING CHEMOTHERAPY ABOUT ONCE A MONTH. THE OTHER PROTOCOL IS QUITE HARSH, BUT IT WOULD BE OVER IN ABOUT 12 WEEKS. IN BOTH CASES, WE WILL FOLLOW WITH A MONTH OF DAILY RADIATION TREATMENTS.

# PICTURE STORY REVIEW

Clemente Botelho

## featuring:

**brief overviews of: BONE • NAUGHTY BITS**

**pocket reviews of:**
**PALESTINE • REAL STUFF • DUPLEX PLANET • DANGLE MELODY • BLACK DOGS • MOTHERLESS CHILD • LOWLIFE DIRTY PLOTTE • ACME NOVELTY LIBRARY**

**•a quick scan of MAUS on CD ROM•**

# BONING UP ON YOUR POGO

## A brief overview of Jeff Smith's *Bone*

### by Michael Redhill

Allow me to share with you a few of my regrets.

I will skip the universal ones (I have not been to Tibet, I cannot finish any of **Thomas Mann**'s novels, I do not possess an effective backhand,) and focus on some more specific concerns I have about a corner of the world that matters to me.

I refer to something no grown man in his right mind should refer to with a straight face. I am speaking of *Funny Animal comic books*.

My first regret is that I must call these great motherlodes of popular Americana by as infantilizing a name as "Funny Animal". This genre is represented by some of the greatest impressarios who ever worked in the field, men who both wrote and drew their stories, men like **Carl Barks**, **Walt Kelly**, **Floyd Gottfredson** and **Al Taliaferro** (and whoever the gentleman was who wrote and drew the Fox and Crow stories). For many years we have lacked story-tellers with the kind of ability, the political acumen and the powers of characterization of these men. Kelly, Gottfredson and Taliaferro are all dead now, and Barks is well into his dodderinghood, churning out shaky-looking lithos for the Disney Studios. I regret that the age of those artists is over.

WHY DON'T YOU LOSE TH' CUPIE-DOLL AN' COME BACK! I COULD TELL YOU ALL ABOUT GATHERING HONEY IN THE GIANT TREES DOWN SOUTH . . .
I'M NOT A CUPIE-DOLL! I'M A BONE FROM BONEVILLE! AN' WHAT MAKES YOU SO GREAT?

**A "CUPIE - DOLL" CONVERSATION FROM JEFF SMITH'S *BONE***

Recently, a hue and cry has gone up over the work of an independent artist whose name is **Jeff Smith**, and who puts out a comic book called ***Bone***. He has been compared to Walk Kelly, by people, I can only speculate, who have never read anything by **Walt Kelly**. I don't want to blacken Mr. Smith's eye (or have my own blackened) because I find ***Bone*** charming. But I also find it sad because it's good enough to make people invoke a truly golden age, yet not quite good enough to attract the kinds of readers who would know at one glance that it's a pale imitation.

***Bone***, now a dozen issues old, is an on-going serial about the eponymous main character, and his two cousins, Phoney Bone and Smiley Bone, all three of whom were tossed out of "Boneville" for a prune-related crime before the beginning of the story. They have wandered near and far, evading giant meat-eating rodents, and laying up at a small village where they have been welcomed and have, variously, been put to work, fallen in love, written bad poetry, and tried to fix a cow race. (Not to mention being visited by someone in a cowl, someone who looks suspiciously like Death).

I find ***Bone*** a cut above most of the rest of what are commonly referred to as "alternative" comics: it's consistent, the art is lovely (although Smith needs a quick anatomy lesson - issue 7 featured a shirtless youth with arms that looked like they'd been extruded through a Fuzzy Pumper Barber Shop), and the story is interesting, although I fear that it is about to turn into a religious allegory of that particular New Age stripe and makes me rather weak and nauseated. My beef with the book is perhaps a little unfair, because, referencing an age of comic books that I love, it fails to work on the levels they succeeded so admirably on. In a sense, I'm griping that **Bone** is not something else, but I also think that the comic book offers an occasion to discuss what has happened in this neglected little universe that is so cloyingly called "Funny Animal".

We may begin by asserting that there are no

funnier animals than people, and here is where Kelly and company began their explorations. Pogo, Donald Duck and Uncle Scrooge were anthropomorphications of recognizable types of their day, namely Americans, living in America. The creators of these books were connected to their time and their place, and these comics proceeded out of a secreted, but powerful, concern for the issues of the day. Barks is an out and out Capitalist (cf. any number of theses and tracts critical of the Disney Ducks for inculcating ruthless Capitalism in young children), and Kelly more of a crypto-socialist, but he's more concerned with political systems than he is with parties. The ***Pogo*** strips, comics and books are some of the best populist criticism we have of American politics in the fifties. No Eisenhower, no MacArthur and no Korea = no ***Pogo***. The great irony was that these comic books (corrupting or not, depending on your position) were marketed for children, but have had a lasting appeal because they're such brilliant allegories. World literature has only a few works that fit into this category, and at the moment I can only think of ***Gulliver's Travels,*** and I will confidently place **Walt Kelly** in that company. Those books came out of place and time, and (Kelly more than Barks, most would agree) they are lasting records of an era in an artform that came into its own partly out of the exigencies of that time.

Yes! We of the Jack Acid Society are joined by some powerful leaders in deploring uninhibited freedom of the Press---
BULLY FOR YOU BOTH.
Don't disparage! Unrestricted freedom in these days can lead to DEATH!
WELL, TO BE ALIVE AIN'T ALWAYS THE SAME AS BEIN' FREE.
**EXAMINING WEIGHTY ISSUES WITH FLIPPANCY: A CONVERSATION WITH POGO, BY WALT KELLY**

Here is the main point of conflict with ***Bone***. Addressing little more than itself, it gives the illusion of having the kinds of concerns those Golden Age stories did, but it does so without taking those kinds of risks. It's gorgeously shallow. ***Bone*** comes out of a time in American culture when cultural perspectives are bizarrely skewed, and political agendas are mired in the garbage of personal ideals. The splintering-off that's resulted from this development in the American politic is reflected in its art, and one of the more curious effects is that the path into the past, the connection of modern art-forms to their precursers, has all but closed over. So it's possible to compare **Jeff Smith** to **Walt Kelly** and there's not much of an argument about it because we exphasize their style over their content, and that's a level on which we're comfortable, and one on which there is some comparison to be made. But it means less than nothing because it is a victory of appearance over thought. Our good old liberal education machines have produced people who think as if their minds are gigantic buffets. You can get a little of a lot, but not a lot of anything. A culture of such minds creates phenomenons like new religions (a bit of Buddhism, a bit of Freud, a dollop of Jung and a side of Tao), Rush Limbaugh (Ronald Reagan plus William Morris plus Pol Pot) and ***Bone*** (***Pogo*** ÷ ***Casper*** x [**Al Capp's *Schmoo*** + ***Little Lulu***]). It's a sad mess.

***Bone***, for me, despite its creator's obvious talents, is a reminder that America is the only place that eats its young *and* its old. This is a book that references great popular artists without really understanding what they had set out to do, and is merely entertaining because it's toiling away in a place without knowing what can be grown in that place. And that seems to me to be both a little wasteful, and not a little ignorant. My final regret is that noodling on about nothing very much seems to pass for discourse these days, and even at the level of a pop artform like comic books, it's too bad that it's enough for most. Kelly and company found it impossible not to respond on some level to what was happening around them, but today's "Funny Animals" are really more sad than funny, saying little and looking great. Maybe the artists of the day just follow the style of the president in power? ***Bone*** hasn't got the depth of that which it seems most to imitate. Or, to paraphrase Lloyd Bensten to Dan Quayle: Mr. Smith, I knew **Walt Kelly**, and you, sir, are no **Walt Kelly**.

# GREGORY'S GIRLS

## A brief overview of Roberta Gregory's *Naughty Bits*

**by Steve Solomos**

In a speech given in 1992, the novelist and essayist **Amos Oz** spoke of the different approaches he takes as a writer. At one point he ponders:

Is it immoral for a writer to turn his pen into a political weapon, or is it immoral for him not to beat his pen into a polemic sword?...I have been involved in politics, without giving myself over entirely to the crude craft of producing manifestos, coarse sermons, or simplistic political allegories. Whenever I find that I agree with myself 100 percent, I don't write a story; I write an angry article...

Were that cartoonists like **Roberta Gregory** would head these words. Her comic book ***Naughty Bits*** (now 12 issues old), features precisely the types of "course sermons" to which Oz refers, and does so while masquerading as a series of legitimate fictions. There is no doubt about the degree to which Gregory agrees with *herself* prior to penning a new tale for ***Naughty Bits***.

**ROBERTA GREGORY'S OVER-THE-TOP PORTRAITS FROM *NAUGHTY BITS***

Her book is essentially used as a platform for pushing her pro-woman, feminist agenda. Her main character is featured during the series as a young girl (Bitsy Bitch), a teenager (Hippie Bitch) and as an adult (Bitchy Bitch). In each case our heroine is faced with the dilemma of being a woman in a paternalistic, male dominated society that treats women, both in political and personal terms, like second class citizens.

Yet here's the rub. Gregory's transparent criticisms of society *can* be quite valid and further, that many of the things she writes about are sometimes useful. Gregory examines some of the larger issues at stake (like the relative value of women being sexually abused and/or mutilated in art and literature - this subject being tackled in ***Naughty Bits*** #1), but doesn't ignore some of the less overt slights that help to keep women down (as when figures like **Amos Oz** refer to writers only in the masculine in the passage quoted earlier). The problem though isn't *what* she's saying, but rather the method she's using to saying it.

In ***Naughty Bits*** #3, there is a story called "Bitsy Bitch goes to School". Here, our young protagonist is seen to suffer through a stream of abuses both mental and physical: classmates, parents and a molesting uncle all get in on the act. It *could* have been a good story but Gregory's overwrought tone leaves the reader (or at least this reader) cold and unaffected. Her classmates are universally cruel and spiteful ("Ha! She's going to be an ol-l-d maid!"), her father is obnoxious, loud and a racist to boot ("They always got to stick some goddammed nigger kid in the commercials these days... "). The uncle's face is never even seen so he is effectively dehumanized as well. Thus, instead of drawing us into the work, these one-dimensional portraits manage only to desensitize us. We become cognizant only of Gregory's lacklustre attempt to impart some jewel of wisdom.

By contrast, cartoonist **Debbie Dreschler** has explored similar themes in her work with much greater success. In two short stories, "Visitors in the Night" and "Constellations", Dreschler's understated (autobiographical?) account of a young girl being molested by her father engages us immediately with her rich use of the diversity of human emotion and behaviour. She avoids most of the traps that are so easy to fall into

with these types of stories. I don't wish to spoil the effect for those unfamiliar, so I won't reveal any details. Both stories are available in the anthology collection, ***The Best of Drawn & Quarterly***. They achieve what **Roberta Gregory** might have been able to if only she could see anything but red.

It is this desire to be single-mindedly didactic that becomes her aesthetic downfall. In the eighth issue, for instance, a tale of teenaged "Hippie Bitch" is stopped in mid-stream for an essay-style instructional lecture on the "dilation and curettage" abortion method. Though it was an enlightening mini-guide to this apparently dangerous and archaic technique, it also effectively demonstrated Gregory's chief problem: her preachy, message-oriented approach. She has something to tell us which takes precedence over any story she's trying to relate. If she had to include it, surely there was a more suitable way to integrate this information into the story than the battering-ram style she employed.

I suppose I simply agree with Oz: that one should keep overt political rants away from one's art. But on this subject there are differing views. In a recent interview, author **Margaret Atwood** said: "What I don't like is people thinking that they can't put politics into art because one is contaminated and the other pure, that art should only be about the psyche..." And indeed her novels contain much socio-political commentary. Yet Atwood's characters are real. They do not conform to any precepts of stereotypical behaviour in order to suit a grander purpose. Later in the same interview, she states that some folks "think that novels are how-to books or books of philosophy or that they are my theory-of-life type books... Novels are about people, people moving through time interacting with one another..." Even though a given societal structure and its potential inequities may play a role in her work, Atwood is clear that real art (or her art) is not easily reduced and its themes are anything but nakedly delineated. This is where works like ***Naughty Bits*** run aground. Gregory's women and men are merely cogs in the machinery of an organized plan. And her comic is nothing if not a "theory-of-life" type book.

**DEBBIE DRECHSLER'S LOW-KEY TERROR FROM "VISITORS IN THE NIGHT."**

Alright, so **Roberta Gregory** is no **Margaret Atwood**. This is not a crime. But Gregory isn't even as good as **Debbie Dreschler**, and this is a far more attainable goal.

The truth is that she is capable of writing better fiction. Her other series, ***Artistic Liscentiousness***, exhibits proof of some talent in this area. But ***Naughty Bits*** is her forum, the podium from where her thoughts can be articulated. Each book even contains a segment where Gregory depicts herself adressing the reader directly. In a way these sections are more honest because there is no pretense. A story doesn't have to be created to 'dress-up' a particularly strong and unwavering opinion that she wishes to express.

It seems she takes a much different approach with the material in ***Artistic Liscentiousness***, a low-key cartoon narrative about human relationships. And that approach appears to comply with the Oz-ian theory of story-telling. To again quote him:

If I find more than just one argument in me, more than just one voice, it sometimes happens that the different voices develop into characters and then I know that I am pregnant with a story. I write stories precisely when I can step into several antagonistic claims, diverse moral stances, conflicting emotional positions.

In ***Naughty Bits***, **Roberta Gregory** writes stories becase she has an axe to grind. And though this may not invalidate her message, it would certainly seem to do so in regard to the effectiveness of her story-telling.

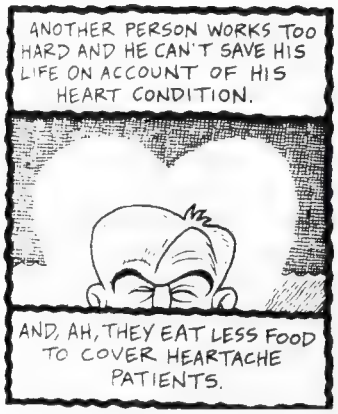
***PALESTINE* NO. 5**
**Written & illustrated by**
**JOE SACCO**
**Published by**
**FANTAGRAPHICS BOOKS**

I think this is a hell of an achievement. At this point, the fifth installment of an apparent nine-issue run, Joe Sacco has managed to move a highly volitile issue (Jews and Palestinians / Israel and Palestine) onto a *subconscious* plane, where as a writer he riffs on the free-association (Palestine - homeland - terrorism, etc) and as an artist, constructs these overwhelming pages of image and text. Which is not to say that *Palestine* is not a political book - it is - it's just that Sacco has discovered that noone's going to listen unless they undergo it with him.

In issue five the story continues in its way, banging along like a Bartok symphony - here's Sacco exposing the plight of Palestinian women, later he shares in a joke at their expense. The whole thing is a terrible mess - like the region - a rush and a gamble. Sacco's persona in the book is just barely likeable, plenty of unpopular opinions are voiced (some of them borderline anti-semitic - as a Jew it was good to hear, but hard to listen to) - *this* is verisimilitude - form and meaning holding hands. Overall, this is a terrific series (even with the didacticism - ten pages of hand-writing await you at the end of the second issue) and a real risk in a business where the risk can mean death. Take a look. - MR

***REAL STUFF* NO. 17**
**Written by**
**DENNIS EICHHORN**
**Illustrated by various artists**
**Published by**
**FANTAGRAPHICS BOOKS**

*Real Stuff* #17 includes a short tale called "Bus Stop". While waiting for a bus, author Dennis Eichhorn is accosted by two men asking for money. After receiving concrete proof that our hero is penniless, they simply walk away. End of story. Wow - this *is* real stuff! Random events connecting up with the result that nothing substantive happens. (Incidentally, the occassions of violence, weird sex and drug use that pepper the majority of Eichhorn's *oevre* do not necessarily constitute substance in my view.) More than having anything to say, it strikes me that books like *Real Stuff* (and *Big Mouth, American Splendor, Colliers*, etc) are designed as a protest against order. They seem to say "*True* stories don't actually go anywhere." But self-obsession does - for Eichhorn he's gotten to seventeen issues of it at Fantagraphics. I don't mind *Real Stuff*, but that's hardly a rave. Books like these create their own ego-ghettos, and if you like the persona, you'll like the book. I'm not sure why Eichhorn has a desire to tell me all about himself - he hasn't yet revealed anything terribly interesting about the world - his or mine. So I'm not a big fan, but you might be, in which case this issue is more of the same great stuff you've come to expect from Dennis Eichhorn. -MR


ANOTHER PERSON WORKS TOO HARD AND HE CAN'T SAVE HIS LIFE ON ACCOUNT OF HIS HEART CONDITION.
AND, AH, THEY EAT LESS FOOD TO COVER HEARTACHE PATIENTS.

***DUPLEX PLANET ILLUSTRATED* NO.7**
**Written & edited by**
**DAVID GREENBERGER**
**Illustrated by various artists**
**Published by**
**FANTAGRAPHICS BOOKS**

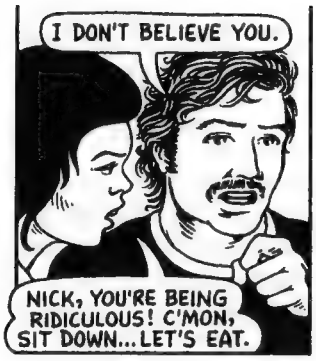
This is *such* a gonzo idea for a comic book. David Greenberger has been recording the stories of senior citizens of the Duplex Nursing Home in Boston since 1979. He's published a newsletter since then, recorded a couple of tapes and even published the poetry of a one Ernest Noyes Brookings ("Homes plug in add bread/ Wait for slices to toast/ When finished add spread/ Delicious to any host..." Greenberger's now approached scores of artists to illustrate these spoken tales. Number seven features Pat Moriarty, Dame Darcy and Rick Altergott, among others.

It's a great read - plenty of that "shock of the real" thing. In discussing the human heart a man named Abe Surgecoff says: "Another person works too hard and he can't save his life on account of his heart condition." Then: "And, ah, they eat less food to cover heartache patients." Yep: it's geriatric dadaism. Also it's a little cruel. Poor bastards don't even know we're laughing at them. Still, it's worth the cash. Also - pick up the first number - it's got a swell flexidisk and the mark-my-words-it'll-be-a-classic Brookings' story "Shut Up" with the killer line "Shut up, don't cause a bong I'm the only one who competes in sports." Whoo - air's a little thin up in that there Duplex Planet. -MR

***DANGLE* NO. 2**
**Written & Illustrated by**
**LLOYD DANGLE**
**Published by**
**DRAWN & QUARTERLY**

*Dangle* is...well, bits out of Lloyd Dangle's life. Apparently, Lloyd is from Detroit and his father isn't all that understanding. Lloyd is not always a very nice guy, but he knows this, so it's actually okay. Lloyd has discovered that people are not very nice to you when they discover you're an artist, and that they can actually be quite mean.

What makes a good autobiographical comic? Draftmanship isn't really at issue because personal lives aren't normally that nice to look at anyway. The best artist of the recent crop, Joe Matt, still gets his points for his ability to tell a story well. Same for Chester Brown who has slowly turned his attention in on himself over the last few years. Chester has a rather rare gift for psychological insight and the seeming banality of his comic-novels, like the recent "Fuck", are rescued by a consistent and steady inward gaze which reveals and enlarges. Mr. Dangle, it seems, has a special gift only for shoving at the reader whatever he happens to have ready. The second number of this series is a hodgepodge like the first: pages out of sketch books, a little personal travelogue of Detroit, some oddball stuff (some of it in colour), and a touching two-page tale of two guys getting served burritos. I *was* quite intrigued by a wordless tale which takes up the middle of the book, but Dangle intends to continue it in the next issue, so I don't know how it ends, why it's there, or why Dangle thinks it's particularly useful to take up the middle of the issue with an incomplete piece of comic book mime. The point of dividing a story into unfinished parts is to exploit the reader's anticipation. The story in question ("A Delivered Job") is hardly that exciting, and the only reason I can think of for leaving it half-done is that Dangle hadn't finished the drawings by the time the book was to go to press. As for my quaking desire to see how it ends - well, if I happen to remember by the time *Dangle* # 3 comes out that there's something in it I ought to see, then I'll pick it up. Otherwise, you, dear reader, and I can go to our graves without knowing and it shant haunt us in the after. -MR




***MELODY* NO. 8**
**Written by**
**SYLVIE RANCOURT**
**Illustrated by**
**JACQUES BOIVIN**
**Published by KITCHEN SINK PRESS**

When does the statute of limitations run out on subtitles? Sylvie Rancourt has been calling *Melody* "The true story of a nude dancer" since the first issue - but here we are, eight issues and five years later (that's one about every seven and half months) and *we're still in the prologue.* Amazingly, it's taking Sylvie Rancourt longer in the comics to become a stripper than it did in real life. I think for the most part the title deserves the praise it's received - Rancourt is an unusually credible voice - but readers have been flying on faith now for *years.* Enough egg-farming in Abitibi! Cut to the chase. Issue eight offers the second best thing - Melody and Nick finally arrive in Montreal, where Nick's cheap relatives share the hospitality chores.

The issue is representative of the series' best and worst qualities. Rancourt and artist Jacques Boivin continue to show us red-blooded French-Canadians having orgies, trying to be good Catholics, and uttering charming curses ("Consecrated wafer of excrement!"). But the story is still edging ahead an hour at a time. And so much utterly undramatic exposition! They go to sleep, they wake up, they get dressed. Wow - I can hardly wait seven and half months for the next issue. Rancourt *is* to be congratulated for the sensitivity with which she reports the inner lives of her characters, and the (gulp) wholesome openness of their sex lives - but many of us already have inner lives and sexual relationships. Very few of us, however, are strippers (although most of us are whores) and the promise of this title is admission to that secret life. So far, Rancourt hasn't taken the step over that line, and we (we of the five year wait) haven't either. -MR

***BLACK DOGS* NO. 1**
**Written & Illustrated by**
**HO CHE ANDERSON**
**Published by FANTAGRAPHICS BOOKS**

Ho Che Anderson calls *Black Dogs* "merely a discussion" but it's more than that. It's a blast of precision rage aimed at the heart of Black American complacency. Even though it purports to be a prelude to Anderson's proposed 3-volume Martin Luther King biography, *Black Dogs* works quite well on its own, thank you. It begins by telling the story of a young couple living in L.A. two months after the 1992 riots. Monk is a latter day Malcolm X, kept just this side of Farrakhanism by his very pregnant partner, Sonjhe. She's more of a liberal - "those riots were not correct" - and finds herself railing at Monk's racism. "Them Korean motherfuckers are the new Jews," he says, and she lays him out: "Do you realize that every last word out of your mouth is bullshit?"

Anderson gives equal time to both viewpoints - quite an accomplishment in itself - but the incident that closes the issue tells us which direction *Black Dogs* is going in. Monk confronts a trio of smirking white kids and gets decked. Yet he saves his real anger for Sonjhe - "You see how they are? When will you open your eyes?" Anderson's voice is a trustworthy one; it's difficult to ride the space between passion and polemics, but he's doing it. I hope he can stick to his task. This is easily the most explosive crisis of faith in American history, and the way this culture is built, a comic book might just be the right place to get it all out in the open. -MR

***MOTHERLESS CHILD* NO. 1**
**Written & Illustrated by**
**THOM WEBB SCOTT**
**Published by**
**KITCHEN SINK PRESS**

This is a one-shot debut from an artist who also apparently writes for the theatre. The drawings are beautifully detailed stipplings - I'll never know how someone can sit in one place for the amount of time it takes to pointillate somone's entire head - and, more to his credit, Thom Webb Scott has managed to do what Drew Friedman makes his living doing without referencing him. The story is told from the point of view of a young woman whose uncle Kenny was haunted his entire life by a joke someone played on him as a child. "How can you play, when your mother's home dying?" a girl yells to the six-year-old boy. He rushes home to find his mother alive and well, but the experience marks him for life. "He really believed he couldn't find his mother," Scott writes, and Ken becomes a man who lives as if he is about to lose everything at any moment. As his parents age, that reality comes closer and Ken loses his grip.

This is a solid debut from a total unknown. The voice of the young woman is an especially impressive accomplishment. She's a real voice who tells her story in an understated and affecting way. -MR

***LOWLIFE* NO. 4**
**Written & Illustrated by**
**ED BRUBAKER**
**Published by**
**AEON PRESS**

A reviewer should ideally approach any new subject with an open mind, no preconceptions. Yet I confess to having more than a few preconceptions about *Lowlife*, a comic whose first two issues contained some of the most amateurish and derivative stories this side of Colin Upton's *Big Thing*. Given that Ed Brubaker's work in these books showed absolutely no promise, I was perfectly prepared to dislike this latest issue. Incredibly, I didn't.

*Lowlife* #4 is not only removed from being bad, it is in the neighbourhood of being somewhat palatable - particularly the first story, "The Girlfriend and the Boyfriend", which makes effective use of third-person narration to draw us into the characters' thoughts and dilemmas.

Unfortunately, the improvements on the visual end do not match those on the written side. Brubaker simply is not a very good illustrator nor a particularly adept cartoon storyteller. He owns a very limited range in the depiciton of his characters' facial expressions and his figures always appear stiff. However, if he can expand on the relative success of this issue's first tale, composing longer, more involved narratives, it may just be enough to carry him to a *certain* level anyway. With some hesitation, one might even say that there's cause for guarded optimism here. -SS

***DIRTY PLOTTE* NO. 8**
**Written & Illustrated by**
**JULIE DOUCET & CO.**
**Published by**
**DRAWN & QUARTERLY**

What happens to creators when they receive over-exuberant and undeserved praise early in their careers? Well in Julie Doucet's case it's not a pretty sight. By the time her work graduated from the world of self-published mini-comics to respected anthologies like *Weirdo* and *Drawn & Quarterly* she had already become a star. When *Dirty Plotte* #1 came out both peers and critics were practically falling over themselves in a mad bid to anoint her as the new 'Queen of Underground Comics'. This was and is a foolish pronouncement. *Everyone* knows that Aline Kominsky is the only *true* Queen. And although this latest issue of *Dirty Plotte* achieves perhaps a new high in irrelevance, Doucet proved long ago to be just another pretender to her throne.

But let's leave unfair comparisons aside. No one need contrast her work with that of Kominsky's to find it lacking in just about every category except draftsmanship. Doucet, despite her other shortcomings, is one of the field's finest illustrators. Her 'writing' however has not progressed beyond the infant stages evident in her earliest strips. Here's the outline for a typical Doucet story: an incohesive, oblique plot sprinkled with odd characters babbling in non-sequiters and ending in abrupt or unexpected fashion. This formula has been used for most of the stories she's done. Four years ago this may have appeared like a raw but charming initial phase in the career of a burgeoning talent. It wasn't. It was, I suppose, only an indication of what we were to expect from there on in. In some circles, *Dirty Plotte*'s lack of structured, linear narratives might be considered radical or *surrealistic*. In fact, the devices she employs are merely tired (and more than a little tiresome).

As for this eighth issue of *Dirty Plotte* there seem to be changes afoot. But they're not the kind one would hope for. It appears Doucet has turned her book into a quasi-anthology that publishes her work as well as that of Brian Sendelbach, Jeff Johnson and others. But this "new blood" saves her not.

Has Julie Doucet become complacent due to the rave reviews she's received from hip rags like *Artforum* and *The Village Voice*? Did this immediate acceptance stunt her development, curbing any desire to produce stronger, more sophisticated work? Perhaps. These are questions that probably can't be answered with any certainty. But one thing's for sure, she hasn't followed through on the promise many felt her work once held. As a result, *Dirty Plotte* has remained stagnant and has become just so much piffle. -SS

***THE ACME NOVELTY LIBRARY* NO. 1**
**Written & Illustrated by**
**CHRIS WARE**
**Published by FANTAGRAPHICS BOOKS**

There is more to say about this remarkable comic than is permissable within the space of this "pocket review". Suffice it to say this is one of the more significant debuts in recent memory, a book of wit, style, complexity and sheer visual brilliance.

Creator Chris Ware has been around for a few years, some of his short strips having appeared in anthologies like *Raw*, *Snake Eyes* and *Pictopia* (not to mention the gorgeous wrap-around cover he drew for *Pictopia*'s third number). And though these strips were intriguing, nothing could have properly prepared us for the quantum leap Ware has made with *The Acme Novelty Library*.

Starting with the cover, easily one of the most smartly designed pieces you're going to see, Chris Ware takes us genteely into the world of "The Smartest Kid on Earth, Jimmy Corrigan". We begin with the end, the moment of Jimmy Corrigan's death as an old man. From here the story moves backwards, intersplicing vignettes of Jimmy as an adult and as a child, including scenes of imaginative fantasy apparently conjured up by our tortured hero. Jimmy's two personalities are sadly juxtaposed - a wide-eyed dreamer as a child, an emotional cripple and virtual human doormat as an adult. Ware's ability to connect these two time-separated personas is what the word felicitous was meant to describe.

In this first issue, Ware throws everything on the grill - humour, angst, pathos and clever pop-culture references, just to name a few. Barbecued to perfection, it all makes for a sumptuous and moving feast. Highly recommended. -SS

# CD ROM REVOLUTION?
## *MAUS* ON CD ROM

***The Complete Maus***
By **art spiegelman**
Published by Voyager

The last thing anyone needs is another review of ***Maus***. The most celebrated cartoon novel in the medium's history requires no further praise from me. But what of the value of ***Maus*** on cd-rom?

At first, I was sceptical of the whole idea of ***Maus*** being transferred to this format. My initial thought was: "I wonder what kind of silly, gimmicky features this thing's going to showcase." Never did I imagine that the ***Maus*** cd-rom could add to the original in such an inventive and stimulating way.

But this is precisely the case. Being a computer neophyte, I can be easily awed by the capabilities of certain software programs. What they've done with this cd-rom however will, I think, impress even seasoned computer veterans.

Simply put, this is a remarkable piece of work. It is a multi-media wonder that never ceases to astonish technically. And as a historical overview of the roots of ***Maus***, it proves to be an invaluable artifact.

As everyone should know by now, the story of ***Maus*** was spawned by taped conversations between the Spiegelmans, father Vladek and son Art. This dialogue is depicted in the original work, but now we can actually *hear* Vladek's words. The simple clicking of an icon affords us the opportunity to listen to Vladek's thickly-accented account of his chilling travails. It makes for a stirring experience.

There is much of Vladek's voice on the cd-rom. He punctuates the majority of ***Maus***' 271 pages, all of which can be easily accessed in any order. Appropriately enough, these bits correspond with the same pages to which the dialogue refers. These segments are worth the price of the cd-rom alone.

**Art Spiegelman** also gets a chance to address the viewer/listener. There is an excerpt from a 1993 interview in addition to the thoughts he expresses intermittently throughout the 271 pages of the story. But, eloquent speaker though he is, Spiegelman sometimes goes over-the-top in his analyses. At one point, he juxtaposes one-dimensional comics characters like Garfield the Cat with the more complicated Lucy of ***Peanuts***. A character of wider range, Lucy, he states, has a "binary complexity". This seemed a bit much.

Otherwise it's a treat all the way through. It even contains about a dozen video clips of the European research trips taken by Spiegelman and his wife **Françoise Mouly**. Also included are previously unpublished drawings and sketches, a family photo scrapbook and maps of Poland and the camps.

It is difficult to imagine anything working as well in this format as ***Maus*** does. The book's sources are ideally suited for the transfer to cd-rom.

So, to where from here for the cd-rom format? Could the work of other authors, cartoonists, musicians come off as well as this ***Maus*** disc? It will be interesting to see. Cartoonists like **Lynda Barry**, or maybe even **Harvey Pekar** or **Robert Crumb**, look to have the kind of artistic credentials that make them worthy subjects for this sort of biographical/historical treatment. I hope it happens, because there appear to be many avenues to explore in this new arena of expression. And the ***Maus*** cd-rom, though only an initial step, is certainly a step in the right direction.

# NEXT ISSUE:

## a feature interview with
## DAVID MAZZUCCHELLI

- MAURICE VELLEKOOP: ILLUSTRATOR EXTRAORDINAIRE
- HARVEY PEKAR ON RUSSIAN AUTHOR ANDREI BELY

***AND MORE*: CARTOON ARCHIVE & PICTURE STORY REVIEW RETURN !**


**• SUBSCRIBE NOW: SAVE BIG BUCKS! •**

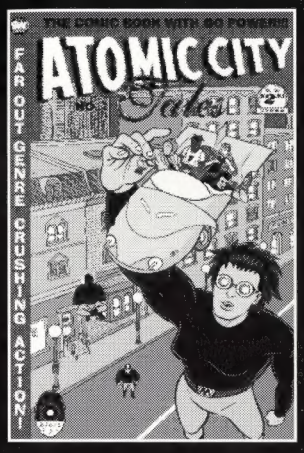
1 YEAR (4 ISSUES) - $16.°° US $20.°° CAN POSTPAID OVERSEAS ORDERS PLEASE ADD 50%

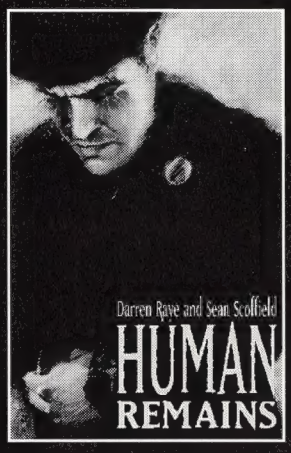
SEND CHEQUE OR MONEY ORDER PAYABLE TO CRASH COMMUNICATIONS IN EITHER U.S. OR CAN FUNDS

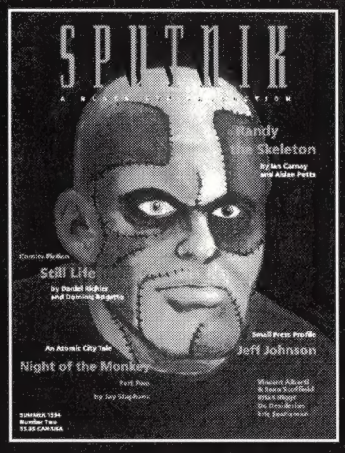
Submissions and letters are welcome.
Mail to CRASH COMMUNICATIONS 601 Markham St. Toronto, Ontario M6G 2L7

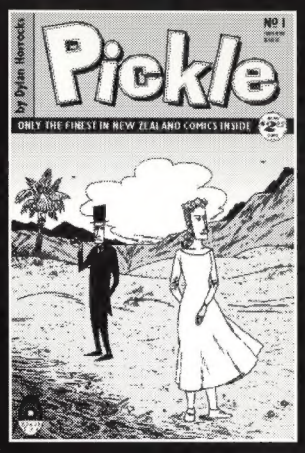
# FOUR NEW EYE OPENING COMICS

LOOK FOR THESE AND OTHER FINE BLACK EYE PUBLICATIONS IN A COMIC SHOP NEAR YOU.
OR, ORDER DIRECT FROM THE ADDRESS BELOW. ASK FOR THE FREE BLACK EYE CATALOGUE.




**"Welcome to the alternative mainstream. Atomic City Tales crackles"**

**MIKE ALLRED**

**"Human Remains is intriguing and very beautiful."**

**NEIL GAIMAN**

**"...sweet production values and a care for detail. It looks great and reads even better"**

**THE COMICS JOURNAL**

**"...exceptional ...well written and beautifully drawn."**

**CHESTER BROWN**

N E W

ALL TITLES AVAILABLE NOW

N E W

## Atomic City Tales #1

BY JAY STEPHENS

The spirit and innocence of superhero comics from days past is captured in this brand new series by Jay Stephens and injected with his own special brand of modern humour and insight. Join Big Bang, Adam, the Quirk, the Maniac Gang and Jay himself in Atomic City Tales, the comic book with Go Power!

**24 pages, $2.95**

## Human Remains

BY DARREN RAYE & SEAN SCOFFIELD

Human Remains is an intricate and poetic piece about decision, regret, and looking to the future. This first full-length work —a complete single issue story— by writer Darren Raye and artist Sean Scoffield is sure to strike a chord with anyone who has ever dwelled on the past, or wondered about the future.

**40 pages, $3.50**

## Sputnik #2

EDITED BY MICHEL VRANA

Sputnik is the magazine that thinks it's a comic. This issue features a collaboration between novelist Daniel Richler and artist Dominic Bugatto, a small press profile of Jeff Johnson, as well as stories by Eric Searleman, Brian Biggs; Ian Carney and Aidan Potts' Randy The Skeleton, and more.

**48 pages, glossy, $5.95**

## Pickle #1

BY DYLAN HORROCKS

The Black Eye edition of this lyrical comic's first issue sports brand new cover artwork, and contains the essential first chapter of the continuing Cafe Underground series, as well as the first appearance of the Augustus E. strip that is to haunt comic-book critic Leonard Batts in future issues.

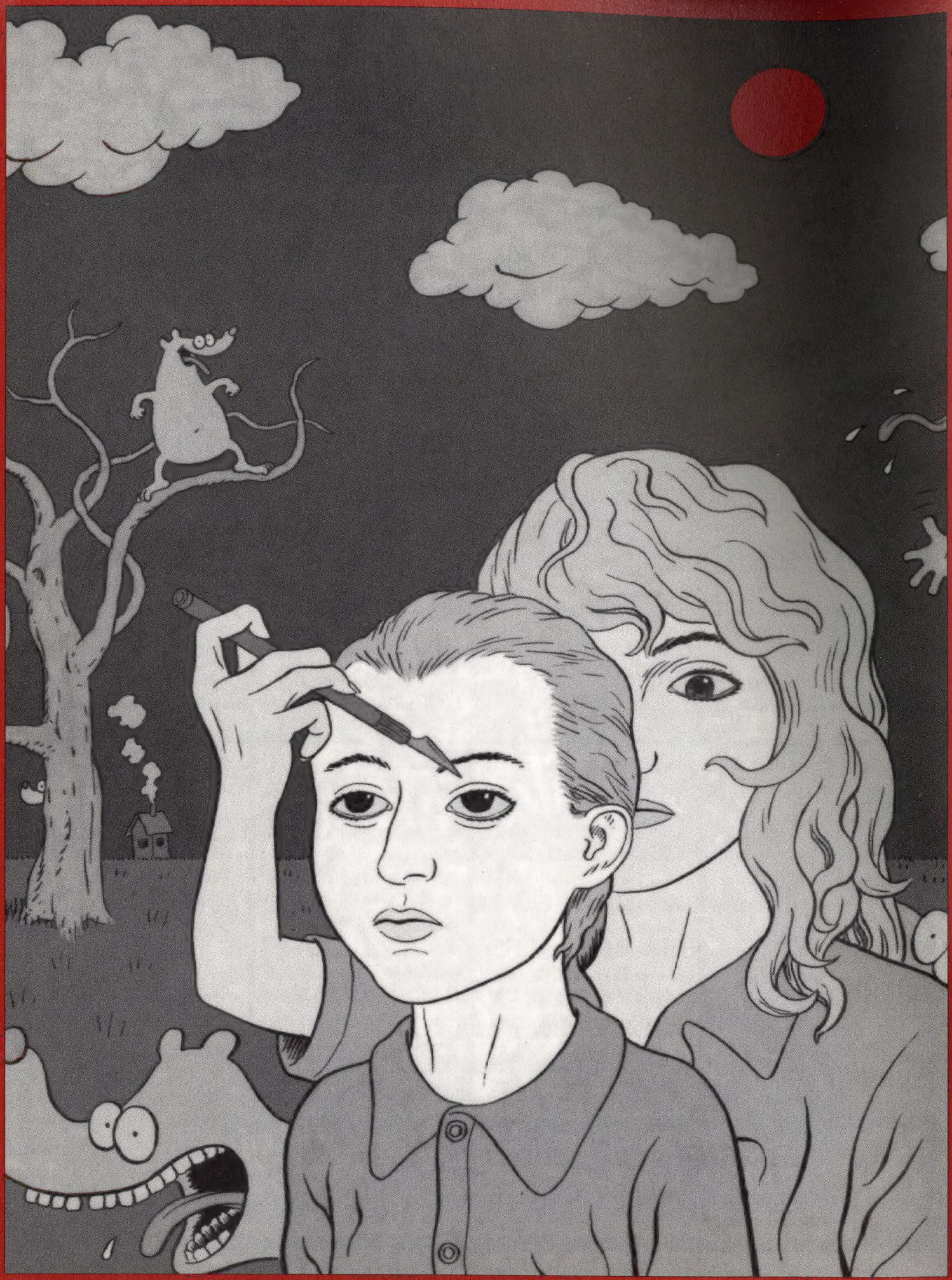
**32 pages, 2nd printing, $2.95**

# BLACK EYE PRODUCTIONS

MANUFACTURER OF FINER COMICS

338 KRIBS STREET, CAMBRIDGE, ONTARIO, CANADA N3C 3J3 VOICE/FAX 519-658-0416

Black Eye




Previously unpublished original **CRASH** cover circa 1992